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BEAUTY FOR ASHES

BY

JOAN SUTHERLAND

Author of

"Wynnegate Sahib," "Cavanagh of Kültann,"
"Wings of the Morning," etc.

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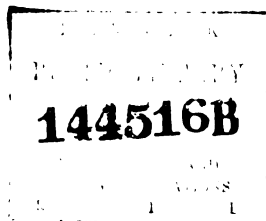


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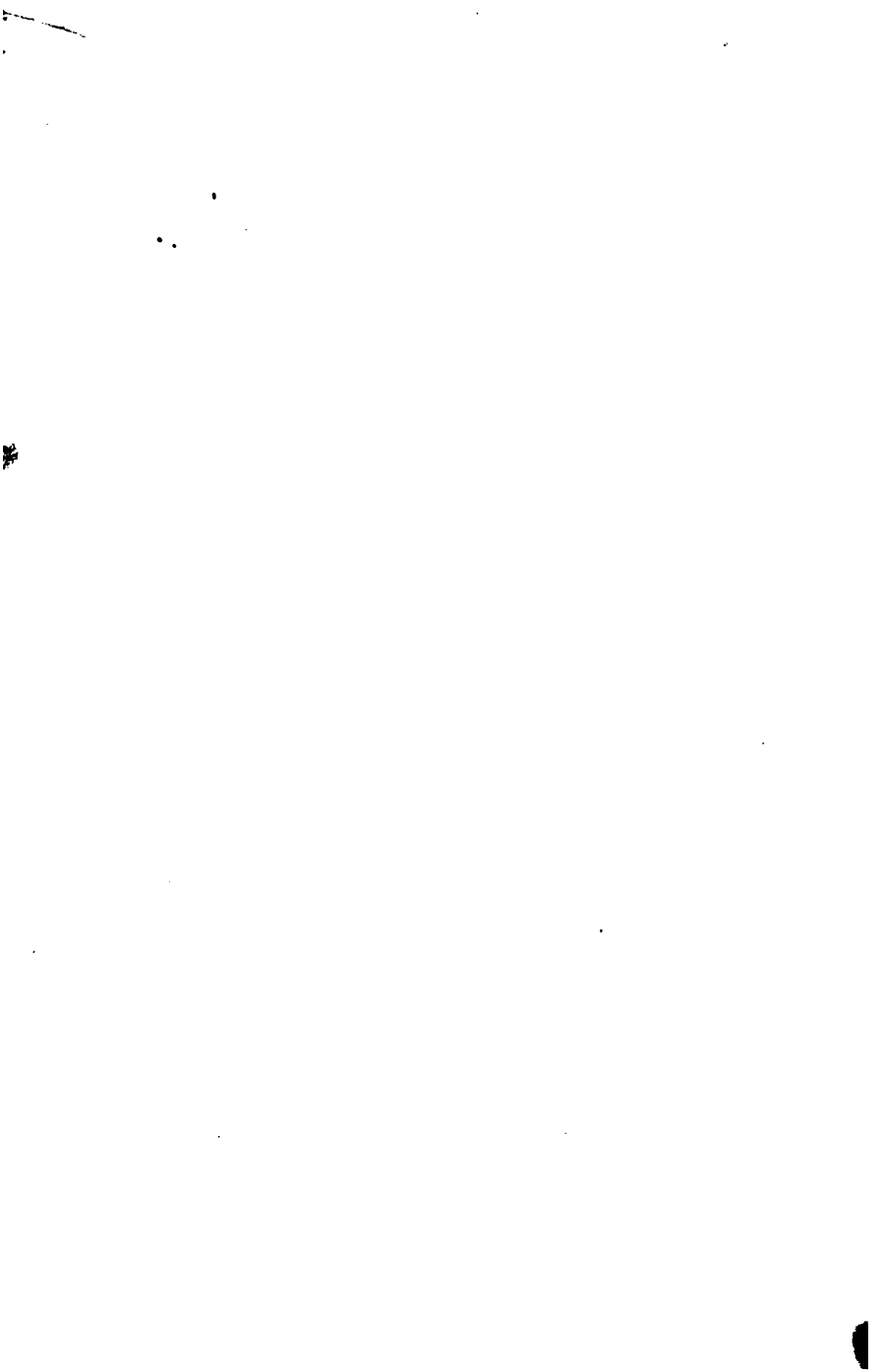
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BEAUTY FOR ASHES















BEAUTY FOR ASHES

CHAPTER I

“**A**H, there you are, Madge! I didn’t expect to see you before the show. Who is with you? *Who*—Pauline? You! Oh, my dear, how glad I am to see you!”

Regardless of the crowd about her, and entirely regardless of a large and drooping hat brim, Lady Eve Wilmot caught the other woman in her arms and gave her a long and enthusiastic embrace, only drawing back when her husband’s voice said, rather dryly,

“When you have quite finished disarranging your friend’s hat, Eve, perhaps you will introduce me.”

Eve laughed, looked at Madge Cardew, and then, still keeping her friend’s hand in hers, said:

“Pauline, may I introduce my husband. Peter—this is Madame de Fleurian.”

“I am so pleased to meet Eve’s husband at last,” Pauline de Fleurian said, holding out one slim hand. “You know I cannot feel you are a stranger.”

“I assure you I don’t want you to,” Peter

Wilmot retorted. "Has Madge inveigled you into coming to see her make her reputation as the leading British actress?"

Madge Cardew, standing by, watching them, shrugged her shoulders.

"Peter, don't be so obvious. Pauline has come because she's charitable and loves her sister-in-law, haven't you, Pauline? And naturally, having regard for her family, she wishes to see that I don't disgrace it. I really must go—I've got to change to my skin!"

Yet she lingered for all that, dainty and slender as a child, with bright brown hair curling beneath the crammed-down jade and silver cap she wore, and brilliant brown eyes in a brunette skin that was flushed with a lovely warmth of colour. Her brows, sloping a trifle upward towards the inner corners, gave her rather a pathetic air, entirely belied by her disposition. A madcap, excitable, too essentially young to have learned caution, entirely regardless of other people's feelings or opinions, Madge was, as her friends expressed it, "riding for a fall."

Her husband, Lionel, otherwise Toby Cardew, brother of Madame de Fleurian, was young too, only twenty-nine, good-looking in a fair lazy fashion, with a gallant war record in the Coldstream Guards and a moderate amount of money. He was pleasant and quite attractive, and why Madge could not content herself with him nobody knew.



Yet she did not. Her flirtations were eternal, and of late she had committed the crowning indiscretion of getting herself talked about with one man in particular, Desmond Harbyn, Eve Wilmot's brother and second son of the Marquis of Clere. Eve adored her brother, and closed eyes and ears to any gossip about her, but her friends were not so kind, and Lord Desmond was very generally looked upon as Madge's lover, whereas in reality he was simply taking the line of least resistance and escorting her everywhere because she seemed to want him, and he was too indolent to refuse.

This afternoon was a case in point. Madge was playing lead in Stephen Phillips' play, one act of which was staged as the chief item in a programme at the New Theatre in aid of a fashionable charity. She was the moving spirit on the Committee, and, being a remarkably clever little actress, was cast for lead. Promptly she had secured Desmond to play Paolo, and, as usual, Desmond had consented, and as the rest of the cast were members of the theatrical profession the juxtaposition was the more marked.

Just as she was about to rush off, Eve Wilmot stopped her.

"Madge, come back to tea with me . . . and bring Toby if he'll come."

Madge nodded.

"All right. Look after Pauline—ask her, too. She's only just back and——"

She hurried away, leaving Eve to turn to Pauline de Fleurian with outstretched hand.

"Pauline, you can't think how delighted I am to see you again after all these years! When Madge told me you were expected to-day I could hardly believe it. You gave me no date in your last letter."

Pauline smiled, and the smile was as much a part of her night-dark eyes as her lips.

"I'm the worst correspondent in the world," she said, in a low clear voice, a voice that seemed essentially fitted to her personality. "And I only crossed last night. I haven't even been home yet. Madge met me and insisted on my spending the morning with her, so I have sent on all my luggage and shall go home after this matinee."

"Not till you've been to tea with me," Eve retorted. "I shall hurry off directly this show is over and then we'll talk. Where is your seat?"

"Fourth row—why?" Pauline's glance roved over the half-filled stalls. "Surely that is Lady Henry Harbyn coming. I must speak to her."

Eve nodded.

"Yes, that is Aunt Clarissa. Row E, No. 5. Why, how very odd! You are sitting next to her. She told me her seat was No. 6. How d'you do, Aunt Clarissa? Do you know you are to have the pleasure of the company of my oldest and dearest friend?"

Eve was addressing a large and stately elderly



lady who had borne down upon them through the ever-increasing stream of people. At her niece's greeting she looked around, and Pauline spoke quietly:

"Lady Henry, do you remember me? It is five or six years since we met. Pauline de Fleurian."

Lady Henry Harbyn surveyed her through tortoiseshell lorgnettes with a little intent frown, then suddenly a smile broke over her rather grim old face.

"My dear child, of course I do! I'm delighted to see you again. You're in the next seat? How very nice. We can have a long talk. What's that, Eve?"

"I must go to my seat," Eve was saying. "The curtain will go up in a minute. Won't you come back to tea with us, Aunt Clarissa? Pauline is coming."

Lady Henry shook her head and settled herself in her seat.

"My dear, I must rest, for there is your dear mother's dinner to-night. Madame de Fleurian will excuse me, since she knows I am not as young as I was. Perhaps she will come and see me. Yes, go, Eve, my dear. The lights are going down."

Eve hurried away, Lady Henry and Pauline exchanged a few low-toned remarks, an invitation was given and accepted, and then the curtain rose on the crowded and fashionable house.

The occasion was a charity matinee organised

by a committee of well-known Society leaders, and the outstanding feature to all the members of the audience, other than the real public, who came either out of charity or curiosity, was the big love-scene from "Paolo and Francesca," in which Giovanni was to be played by a leading actor-manager, Francesca by Madge Cardew, and Paolo by Lord Desmond Harbyn; and Pauline, who was aware of her sister-in-law's talent, was a little curious to see how her Paolo would acquit himself.

She need not have wondered, for when Lord Desmond came on there was a little stir and thrill of admiration through the house, not only for his superb looks, but for his fine performance of a difficult role. He was, like all his family, very tall—only Lord John, his father's brother, was untrue to type, being short, round and rosy—and, like them Desmond was rather pale; but while all the Harbyns had some pretensions to good looks, he had more, for he possessed not only a magnetic personality but great beauty of form and feature.

His sister Eve felt distinctly nervous where she sat with her husband, Peter Wilmot, and when some acquaintance leant over from the stall behind and whispered: "Desmond is very attractive, isn't he, in those clothes?" she only nodded impatiently. She longed to see the performance, yet she felt rather uneasy; and as it proceeded her uneasiness grew, for her brother's acting was not calculated to silence the tongue of gossip. Ardent, passion-



ate, Desmond was playing finely; the whole audience was held by that wonderful love-scene, and Eve began to be uncomfortable; Desmond's voice broken and thick with passion; his kisses, his embraces, all seemed too real, too unrestrained, considering the fact that half his world believed him Madge Cardew's lover. Peter Wilmot alone guessed the truth, which was that Desmond was so carried away by the beauty of the play that he was entirely unconscious of his own identity. Eve, however, could not be so comforted. She admitted to herself that her brother was playing the part with a power and beauty little short of genius, but she was conscious too of her surroundings, of the audience who would not see the real meaning of the performance but would take this as almost shameless avowal of the whispered rumours. Most of all she was conscious of Toby Cardew in the left stage-box, sitting half behind the curtain and watching the stage with an attention that never faltered. She could not see all his face, but his forearm and hand lay along the cushioned edge of the box, and the hand was tightly clenched on the unused opera-glasses. So clenched that every atom of blood had gone from it, and to her this hand appeared to have an extraordinary significance. She moved restlessly once or twice, her hearing acute, her nerves strained, and there came to her ears a whisper from the woman who had spoken from the seat behind:

"I wonder how Toby likes this, Jack?"

That was how London would look at it—as an opportunity to flaunt a love affair; and Eve bit her lips, and Peter, catching sight of her worried frown, laid his hand over hers for a moment and gave it a quick pressure.

"It's fine!" he whispered, so low she could scarcely hear it, and comforted a little, she tried to forget the malicious tongues around her. Only that hand on the edge of the stage-box, motionless the whole performance, she could not forget.

Meanwhile, in the fourth row of stalls, one member of the audience was enjoying the afternoon whole-heartedly, untroubled by any fears and moved profoundly by the emotion that so disturbed Eve: Pauline de Fleurian, sitting by Lady Henry's side, her face white and tense, her whole being appreciating the beauty of the scene before her. What was her surprise, therefore, when the curtain fell, to see Lady Henry frowning portentously, with lips grimly closed, and hear, before her own comment could be uttered, the elderly lady's low and indignant words: "So *that* exhibition is over! My dear child, I apologise for my nephew whole-heartedly!"

"But Lady Henry!" Pauline exclaimed, putting the old-fashioned fur cape around her companion with deft fingers, "Why? It was a wonderful performance."

"It was disgusting! If my nephew wishes to



behave in such a fashion he might have the good breeding to disguise the fact. I consider it positively indecent. Come, my dear, I am too angry to be a pleasant companion, and Eve will be waiting for you."

She sailed slowly up the gangway, clearing a passage for herself by sheer weight and dignity, like an Elizabethan three-decker among modern torpedo boats, and Pauline, following, heard the comments that abounded. The chief opinion seemed one of praise, but there was a certain amusement mingled with it, and just before the exit was reached a feminine voice at her side remarked:

"I wonder how Toby Cardew liked seeing his wife's love affair made so public? I really think Lord Desmond must *want* to be cited as co-respondent!"

The words were spoken in a very low tone, and evidently were not intended to be overheard; but Pauline was too close to avoid unconscious eaves-dropping, and a sudden wave of disappointment swept over her, not unmingled with a sudden pang of anxiety, even though she knew her flighty little sister-in-law well enough.

Eve joined them in the vestibule, her face rather flushed, an air of delicate defiance about her; and Lady Henry, who had been about to repeat her criticism of the performance, suddenly closed her lips tightly, only opening them for a brief farewell.



"We'll go straight off," Eve said rather hurriedly to Pauline. "Peter is waiting for my brother. I want to hear all about your affairs."

She swept her out to the pavement, returning brief greetings to many friends who would have detained her, saw her car a little way up the line of waiting vehicles, and, taking Pauline's arm, drew her to it.

"Home!" she said, and sank down by Pauline's side, pulling the fur rug about her knees. And they talked little till they reached Eve's house in Curzon Street; and, as if by mutual consent, not at all of the afternoon's entertainment.

The drawing-room was large, with three windows curtained in sapphire velvet to shut out the raw November night, beautiful and rare furniture, flowers everywhere, and near the fire, at an angle, a large couch heaped with cushions, a tea-table showing the gleam of silver and old purple and gold, and draped with a cloth of finest linen and Venetian lace. It was a charming room alive with the personality of its owner, and Pauline, who was a great lover of beauty, appreciated it at once.

Eve tossed her fur coat on to a chair and drew Pauline to sit down in a corner near the leaping wood fire.

"Tell me all about yourself before the others come in," she said. "We have years to make up."

And they talked until the sound of a motor draw-



ing up outside interrupted them: Eve learning a good deal about her friend's circumstances, Pauline learning also of Eve's life since they parted, of her travels, the loss of one of her brothers in the war, her engagement and marriage to Peter Wilmot, son of the great cotton magnate.

Voices on the stairs interrupted their conversation. Eve left her chair and moved to one by the tea-table, and Madge Cardew entered, followed by Peter and Lord Desmond, and a young girl with her hair down—Eve's youngest sister, Stella. Instantly the quiet room was filled with a very different atmosphere, conversation, laughter, and the subtle sense of unrest that Madge's presence always seemed to diffuse. Tea was brought in, and Pauline found herself taking the cup of tea Lord Desmond Harbyn was offering to her.

"So you and Eve have found one another," he said. "I have heard her speak of you. Were you at the show this afternoon?"

Without waiting for any reply he put a plate back on the table, then came across the room and dropped into a chair by Pauline's side, stretching out one slender exquisitely-booted foot.

"What a farce these charity shows are," he added, impatience in his voice. "People might as well give the money by cheque, and the charities would benefit more."

"If you despise them so," Pauline enquired, "why do you join in them?"

He lifted his head, removing his gaze from his boots, and looked at her steel blue eyes. Seen close, he was older than she had at first thought, a curious mixture in type of early Greek and Roman: Greek in the line of nose and brow, and Roman in the powerful neck with its curious snaky line from crown to nape. The expression of mouth and eyes was indifferent, almost insolent in its pride, and he possessed to an extraordinary degree the gift known as animal magnetism. She noticed, too, how race showed in his feet and beautifully-kept hands, and being fastidious in these matters he pleased her.

In answer to her question now he merely shrugged his shoulders, and Wilnot coming up to speak to her at that moment he turned his attention to Madge, who was eating a chocolate éclair with the frank enjoyment of a child. As she swallowed the last crumb she held out a sticky hand to him.

"Hanky, please!" she demanded; and he took out his own snowy handkerchief and wiped the chocolate stains from her fingers; and the sight suddenly displeased Pauline, for it implied great intimacy by its very matter-of-factness, and with startling suddenness such intimacy seemed to her to be a thing to be deplored.

Two or three other people came in, and Harbyn had to hear comment, praise and criticism of his performance,—all of which seemed to bore him



profoundly. In the midst of it all a fat little man, with white hair surmounting a rosy clean-shaven face, entered the room, a footman's voice following him in, announced:

"Lord John Harbyn!" and Eve rose from her chair.

"Why, Uncle John, what a surprise! I did not know you were back from Bournemouth."

"Came back this afternoon," the new comer explained. "Couldn't stand the dismal invalid atmosphere an hour longer. Ah, there you are, Desmond! What's this I hear about a wonderful performance at the New Theatre?"

"Nothing, I hope," Desmond returned languidly. "Eve, I must be off. I shall see you to-night, Uncle John."

He bowed in a general way to those of his acquaintances close by, and turned to Pauline:

"May I call upon you one day, Madame de Fleurian?" he asked, and there was a sudden intensity in his tone, totally strange from what appeared to be a characteristic indifference. "Please say yes."

A little surprised, Pauline broke off a conversation with a girl beside her and looked up. His eyes were like blue fire between their suddenly narrowed lids, the pupils curiously dilated, and his face grew white even as she met his gaze, and that pallor and the intensity of eyes and voice affected her strangely. She was not given to sudden friend-

ships, yet now she answered in a tone not quite so composed as usual:

"I shall be pleased to see you," she said; "Eve knows my address."

He drew a quick breath. "Thank you," he said. "May I come on Monday about four?"

To Pauline's annoyance she felt her pulses begin to beat rather unsteadily. It was with something of an effort that she answered: "At four, then, I will expect you, Monday," and without offering to shake hands, returned to her interrupted conversation with her neighbour.

Desmond went across the room to Madge Cardew, who was also making her farewells; and as he came she kissed Eve and called airily to him:

"Desmond! I can drop you at your club if you like, and we can discuss our triumphs on the way."

He stopped short where he stood, and a sudden little hush descended on the room, almost as though everyone waited to hear his reply.

"Thanks, Madge, but I'm not coming your way. I'm going home."

She pouted, shrugging her shoulders and looking more like an adorable and naughty child than ever, and turning her back on him began to talk to Lord John. Desmond, in no way disturbed, walked deliberately to the door, and, as he passed his young sister Stella, touched her arm.

"I want to speak to you," he said; and highly



flattered, she rose and followed him. Outside, in the big softly-carpeted upper hall, with its wide stone staircase twisting down to the ground floor, its grave pictures in heavy gold frames, and dim lights, there was an air of decorum and calm strangely wanting in the room they had left. Desmond seemed aware of it, and passed his hand over his eyes rather wearily, then looked down on Stella waiting so eagerly to hear what he had to say.

"You saw that friend of Eve's—Madame de Fleurian I think her name was. I want you to find out where she lives. Ask Eve, and tell me to-night when I come in."

"Right! You're in for a wiggling to-night, Desmond. Good luck!"

She grinned at him and vanished within the room with a whisk of blue velvet frock and nut-brown hair, and Desmond went slowly downstairs, took his things from the waiting servant, and went out into the raw winter night. He felt at once tired and restless, started towards his home in Berkeley Square, then changed his mind and turned south towards Piccadilly and his club. The night was bitterly cold, with mud underfoot and fog hanging above, and he walked quickly, looking neither to right nor left; and although his conscious thoughts were busy with half a dozen things, he was aware that deep in his sub-conscious mind he was keeping something at bay.

Inside the club, fairly empty at this hour, was

warmth and light in contrast to the cold gloom of the streets, and he made an effort to dismiss the sense of restlessness that had possessed him this last hour. Going into the morning room in search of solitude, he found it empty but for an elderly judge, Sir James Crawford, and was aware of a sense of relief. The judge was back to him, sitting by the fire, reading, and only the top of his white head and one hand lying clenched on the table beside him were visible. It was this hand that suddenly made Desmond aware of the thing that had been sub-consciously disturbing him since the early afternoon: Toby Cardew's hand where it lay clenched along the edge of the stage box.

Desmond came to an abrupt standstill, his nostrils dilated, his mouth tightened. For fully a minute he stood looking at that motionless hand, then deliberately he went across the room, picked up a paper, nodded to Sir James, and dropped into a chair.

The paper was one he seldom read, and he was not aware that he was holding it upside down till a slight noise made him look up to see Toby Cardew just inside the door,—Toby, with his sullen handsome face deeply flushed, his eyes glaring like an enraged animal's, danger in every line of him. As he saw Desmond he came forward; and as if suddenly aware of the tension in the atmosphere, Sir James put down the paper and looked up just as Toby spoke.



"I hoped to find you here. I wanted to speak to you. Shall I say what I have to say here or outside?"

Desmond threw back his head, his face was startlingly white in contrast to Toby's, his look far more dangerous.

"Say it here," he said.

He was breathing rather quickly through his thin arched nostrils and his figure was rigid; otherwise there was no sign of emotion about him, and just because of that, Sir James, knowing somewhat of men, prepared for trouble. At Desmond's answer Toby came right across the room to him and spoke almost in his face:

"Then I will, and I only wish half London was present to hear me. You are a damned scoundrel! Do you hear?"

Desmond bit his underlip, a blue spark leapt for an instant in his eyes and vanished; in a voice as cold as the other's was excited he spoke:

"Have you anything more to say?"

"More to say?" Toby cried, choking. "By God! yes. You're a thief and an adulterer and a damned——"

He never finished the sentence, for Desmond's arm shot out and he went down like a log; but he struggled up again almost instantly, glaring into the elder man's face, and would have thrown himself upon him had not Sir James interfered by catching Toby's arm.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! You forget yourselves! Captain Cardew, those are strong words to use to any man. Lord Desmond, this is not the place for a brawl."

Without actual violence Toby Cardew could not free himself, and Sir James had no intention of letting him go. Lord Desmond was the first to recover himself.

"I beg your pardon, Sir James. If Captain Cardew will come out of the club I will answer him as he deserves."

"If I come out of the club with you it will be to give you a damned hiding!" Cardew cried, his voice thick and shaking. "Do you think I didn't see you this afternoon, or didn't understand? What sort of a complacent fool do you take me for?"

"Captain Cardew!" Sir James' voice rang out with the sternness that the Bar knew well. "Please be silent. Whatever injury you believe Lord Desmond to have done you, it does not excuse your violent language in this place. Be good enough to take your private affairs elsewhere."

The words and tone had their effect; for a moment Toby fumed and stuttered, then, as he quieted down, Sir James relaxed his grip, and Desmond turned on his heel and walked out of the room. He took his hat and coat from the servant and made a deliberate exit, but when he was once more out in the raw night he felt himself trembling



with hard-held rage. Yet even so he felt relieved that the suspense was over; Cardew's words meant but one thing, and if a row had to come it had better come soon. At the corner of Berkeley Street, he hesitated, then turned and went to the big grey house with its window boxes filled, even in this dreary month, with bright berried holly and berberis, and let himself in.

All was very quiet, and he was glad to meet no one as he went up to his own sitting-room; there, going to the telephone, he called up his sister's house, and was answered after a moment by Eve herself.

"You, Desmond? Yes, Eve speaking. You wanted me?"

"Yes," he said, and waited anxiously for her answer. "I want to see you—alone—before dinner. Can you possibly come around early? Ten minutes would do!"

"Oh, my dear!" he heard her dismay. "I don't think I can—Madge wants to stay until dressing time."

"It's about Madge," Desmond said quietly. "It's urgent, Eve."

He heard her say "Madge?" and nodded instinctively.

"Yes. You'll come?"

"I'll come, Desmond."

With a little sigh of relief he hung up the receiver, rose to get a cigarette, and stood looking

absently into the fire while he went over matters in his mind. Cardew had evidently made up his mind to act at last, and had pitched on him because he would do as well as any other, and because that afternoon's performance had worked him up to the necessity for action of some sort. Madge had invariably had many admirers,—the world said lovers,—but he, Desmond Harbyn, was the latest, and he had managed to get himself more talked about than any of her previous acquaintances, principally, though he did not realise it, because of his very magnetic personality and amazing looks.

All he realised was that a crisis had come, and it was only a question of time before the whole thing was public with the ghastly publicity of the daily press. Grinding his heel into the rug, he swung away from the fire and began pacing up and down the room in a long nervous stride, which only ceased when his clock, striking half past seven, warned him that he must dress. His man, Hargood, a fresh-faced, clean-built young fellow, just getting back into the ways of civil life after four years of Flanders and the East, looked at him with some anxiety as he began his toilet. He had been Desmond's servant out there in the mud and cold of the Western front and under the scorching torment of the Eastern skies, and he owed his life to him. When he lay wounded and caught in the



wire, Desmond had gone out across the hell of that waste land, had sheltered him with his body for one awful August day, and carried him back to the British trenches at night, to drop dead as it was thought, on arrival, with a bullet through his kidneys, which he had received unknown even to the man he had saved hours before.

For some weeks it was not expected that Desmond could recover, but he came of a fighting stock and he fought death as gallantly as he had fought the enemy; long leave put him right, and eight months later he went out to Palestine, Hargood with him once again.

Hargood watched him now unobtrusively, yet anxiously, and came to the conclusion that something was very wrong, for never did his master dress at such speed in such grim silence or wear such a look—a look that changed his face into a mask of cold anger such as he, Hargood, had never seen him wear, even before going over the top.

He only spoke once, and that briefly:

“My sister will be here in a few minutes. Tell Parkes to have her shown straight up to my sitting-room and see we are not disturbed till dinner.”

Five minutes later he had left his room and had hardly entered before Eve was announced. She came in hurriedly, her blue velvet cloak with its white fox furs still about her, and, hardly waiting till the servant had retired, spoke anxiously:



"Desmond, what is it? You said it was about Madge? What has happened?"

He took her cloak and put her in a chair.

"Don't get agitated, Eve; things have come to a breaking point, that's all. Listen!"

In a few words he told her what had happened, while Eve sat staring at him and trying to realise the truth of what he had told her. She put one or two questions, was silent for a minute as he ended, then spoke slowly, as if dreading the reply:

"Desmond, is it true what he says? Have you and Madge—been—been—together in that way?"

He came to a standstill and looked across at her where she sat by the fire; the soft light from a big gold-shaded lamp fell on her, making her look very fair and young, and very far removed from the sordid things of life, yet she was a woman, and he must answer her.

"No," he said at last. "It would have been better if we had. I don't blame Cardew. I've given him every cause to think I was Madge's lover. We've been together—I've made love to her—we—I—have been intimate—more intimate than we should have been—but that one thing we have not done——"

"You mean—you—it—would have happened?"

"Yes, inevitably. Play with fire—long enough—and you're certain to be burned. So you see I can't plead innocence."

"But you are innocent! You admit yourself



that you have never—never——” she broke off unable to find a word, and he laughed shortly.

“Never actually committed adultery you mean? Quite right, but all the same I don’t see much difference. I have made love to her often enough, and if the final thing hasn’t happened—well, it’s been because we neither of us were actually sufficiently carried off our feet, and I’ve not yet reached the stage of gratifying either myself or a woman in cold blood.”

“Desmond!” Eve’s voice held a mingled disgust and appeal which checked him instantly. Coming across the room he sat down beside her and laid his hand over hers, where they locked together in her lap.

“Dear, I’m sorry. I’m too disturbed to choose my words. You asked me, and if my answer has been too blunt, forgive me.”

She folded his hand in hers, holding it closely, her blue eyes miserably searching his face.

“If—if Toby Cardew cites you as co-respondent and Madge loses—you—you will have to marry her.”

She heard his teeth grit, and pressed her advantage.

“Desmond, you must stop this! You must! Madge surely won’t let you be dragged into a thing like this——”

“Madge won’t be able to help herself.”

“But she’ll defend?”

"I expect so."

"Then there's still a chance. You don't want to marry her, Desmond, do you?"

He drew his hand away, and rising to his feet went over to the fire-place and stood leaning up against it; into his mind apparently for no reason whatever, flashed the face of the woman he had met for the first time that afternoon, and suddenly, almost violently, he realised that he could not marry Madge Cardew.

The gong booming distantly through the house, roused them both from their unprofitable thoughts, and Eve picked up her gloves.

"Thank heaven the family doesn't know yet," she said, "or this evening would be even more unbearable. I must see you again, Desmond, but how can I?—unless you'll go on to Mrs. Van Katt's dance?"

"I wasn't—but I will," he said, and opening the door stood aside for her to pass out.

In the great drawing room with its dull blue panelled silk walls and old Italian gilded furniture, the other guests were already assembled, and Eve went hurriedly from one to the other, greeting her relatives with that air of being really delighted to see them that had always made her a favourite, even Lady Clere showing some animation at sight of her.

She herself was tall and very nearly a beauty,



her hair still golden brown, her features finely cut, her skin a little lined yet fair and delicate-hued, and she greeted this, her eldest daughter, with a smile, and glanced rather apprehensively at her son: Desmond often puzzled her, and she never felt quite at home with him as she did with her other children. Lord John Harbyn, rotund and rosy, was chatting to Lady Henry, who appeared even more formidable in an evening gown of lavender brocade than she had done in the afternoon; and by her side stood her daughter Dorothy, a pale washed-out looking girl, badly dressed and obviously afraid of her mother, while Lord Henry, tall, thin, and stooping, stood fingering a little jade idol that he had picked up, peering at it with mild short-sighted eyes and quite oblivious to the company around him.

Lord Charles, the only other brother, who was Dean of Halchester, was not present.

"Are we quite the last?" Eve said, looking anxiously around the room. "I was talking to Desmond and forgot the time. Oh, no, Easton isn't here yet."

Even as she spoke the double doors were flung open and Lord Easton came in; tall and good-looking like his family, his left sleeve empty.

"Good evening, everybody!" he remarked. "Please forgive me for keeping you waiting; how are you, Aunt Clarissa? Hullo, Eve!"

Lady Henry sailed across and kissed his cheek, her husband put down the jade idol and murmured beneath his breath:

"Dear me! Dear me! What a tragedy!" and Lord John beamed through his eye-glass and said loudly:

"Not at all! Haven't kept us waiting a moment!"

They went down to dinner informally, and at the foot of the staircase Desmond dropped behind a second and spoke in an undertone to his brother:

"You all right, Easton?"

"Quite, thanks, old man. You look a bit tucked up."

"Nothing wrong with me, but I hate these family dinners."

Easton laughed, and sat down next his cousin Dorothy, into whose pale face the colour suddenly rushed, making her for the moment less abject.

"Cousin Easton, how nice! I was afraid Desmond would be my partner!"

"And you didn't want him? It's very kind of you to prefer me."

He bent towards her, looking into her face with black-lashed dark grey eyes that had worked havoc all his life, and Dorothy twisted her fingers together in an agony of nervousness.

"It wasn't that—I mean—it was—Desmond frightens me. He's so different to you. I don't know what to talk to him about."



"And you do me? Well, we always find plenty to say, don't we? How goes the painting? Aunt Clarissa any more sympathetic?"

A flush of gratitude came once more to her face; leaning a little towards him she began to talk quite animatedly; and Desmond, watching his brother, wondered what magic Easton had employed, for Dorothy's shyness was a by-word in the family.

He himself, absorbed by his own thoughts, was glad of the vacant place beside him which saved him the necessity of talking much. One of his cousins should have filled it, Iris, the daughter of his mother's only brother Nigel, who had been killed during the second month of the war; but at the last minute there had been a telephone message saying she had developed a sore throat, and as her mother fussed over her she had been kept in bed. This disconcerted Lady Clere, who had intended that she and Dorothy should go on together immediately after dinner to a boy and girl dance, for Dorothy would never venture alone, and she certainly was not wanted where she was. The solemn conclave could not be held in the presence of so youthful a member of the family.

Eve, guessing her mother's quandary, came to the rescue at last, suggesting that Dorothy should go to Pauline; and after ringing up the Rectory and ascertaining Pauline was at home, packed Dorothy off in a taxi with a note.

"Dear Pauline,

"Look after my cousin Dorothy Harbyn for two hours, as you are a Christian. My mother's plans have fallen through, and Dorothy is best out of the family scrap which is to take place. I'll fetch her. "EVE."

Easton suggested a move to the drawing-room before his Uncle John had had a third glass of port, so Lord John was in a crotchety mood and Lord Henry was wishing rather sadly to be back in his own library poring over his latest book on Egyptian hieroglyphics—his pet study.

Directly the family had gathered together in the drawing-room Desmond knew his time had come. Lady Henry, as witness of the afternoon's performance, sat herself down in a great Italian arm-chair that had once belonged to a Borgia Pope, and, as it were, opened the ceremony in state.

"Desmond!" she said, and there was a marked severity in her tone, "may I enquire why you chose to play Paolo this afternoon to Mrs. Cardew's Francesca?"

Desmond gave a swift glance around the room; which glance was answered by Eve and Easton. Easton permitted himself the shadow of a sympathetic grin; but Eve, knowing too much, was white, and her eyes sought at once to implore and warn her brother. As for Lady Clere, she avoided his glance and fidgetted with her rings. Lord



John was looking at the ceiling, Lord Henry at his boots. Peter Wilmot, his ugly clever face twisted by a savage frown, looked at Eve.

As Desmond did not answer immediately Lady Henry spoke again.

"I asked you a question, Desmond. Be good enough to answer it."

Desmond thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his dinner jacket.

"I was wondering what you wanted me to say," he said.

"To say? There is only one thing to say: the truth."

"There I don't agree with you," he said, imperturbably. "There are quite a number of other things. As it is, though, I don't intend to say anything—truth or the reverse."

There was a sudden little hush in the room; it was as though the matter had suddenly become serious before its time, and Lady Henry's large placid face flushed.

"Then we may assume you do not care what construction is put upon your friendship with Mrs. Cardew—well, I guessed as much. But even so, you might care about the reputation of your family."

Desmond's nostrils dilated, always with him a sign of emotion, but his tone was quite calm.

"May I ask what right you—or anyone—have to assume anything about me?" he asked.

"The right of a member of your family who does not choose to see that family disgraced without protest!" she answered; and Eve, watching him with painful intentness, saw the almost imperturbable stiffening of his figure.

"You take it for granted that I intend to disgrace it," he said, with a quietness that might have warned her. "May I in my turn ask why, Aunt Clarissa?"

"No one could be associated so closely with that woman without disgrace," she exclaimed, her anger rising at his coolness. "Your conduct has been most reprehensible for months; half London is talking about you, and to crown all comes this disgraceful exhibition this afternoon. Your mother is most distressed. So distressed that she asked me to speak to you."

Desmond looked across at Lady Clere; a curious little shadow passed over his face.

"Is that so, mother?" he asked, very quietly.

Lady Clere lifted her pretty blue eyes full of ready tears.

"I—oh Desmond! It is so unnecessary, all this upset!"

"That thought had occurred to me," he said, dryly. "But did you ask Aunt Clarissa?"

She nodded and felt for her handkerchief.

"I am so worried—yes—yes, I did."

He bit his lip with an impatient shrug, looked across at Lady Henry.



"In that case I can only say that I am sorry my mother did not think fit to speak to me herself," he said. "And as I do not intend to discuss the matter perhaps you will not find it necessary to say any more."

He made a movement towards the door, but Lady Henry lifted her head.

"One moment, please, Desmond. You have thought fit to refuse to answer my questions and you have thought fit to ignore the reflection you cast upon your family; but even so you will scarcely, I think, see fit to permit yourself to figure as co-respondent in a divorce case."

Eve gave a little gasp, and Desmond started as if he had been struck.

"May I ask what you mean?" he said, very low, and his voice was no longer cool, but trembling a little with suppressed anger.

"I hardly think I need go further into a very distasteful matter," Lady Henry rejoined. "You are evidently not unaware of the possibility."

The buttons were off the foils now with a vengeance. Desmond took a step forward, the mask-like indifference gone from his face.

"Distasteful or not you shall tell me what you mean," he said violently. "Do you think you are going to make such a remark and not justify your words? What do you mean?"

There was a general stir in the room. His mother exclaimed "Desmond—oh Desmond!"

and collapsed into her handkerchief, Easton leant across and patted her arm, though his eyes never left his brother's face, and Lord John, pompous and shocked, came to his sister-in-law's rescue.

"Come! Come, my dear Desmond! Really I cannot allow you to speak to your aunt like that! Tch, Tch! No! No!"

"You cannot allow?" Desmond exclaimed. "You? What business is it of yours, or of any-one's? The only authority I recognise in this room is my mother's, and she chooses to do nothing but cry; if she speaks I will listen, but I will listen to no one else—to *no one*. Do you understand?"

He swept the room with a savage glance, waited a moment, then, as no one spoke, went over to his mother.

"Mother, do you wish to speak to me yourself?"

She sobbed for a minute, then raised her head, her pretty faded face flushed and marred by tears, and Desmond felt a little stab of remorse, even though he knew how easy those tears were.

"Mother," he said, more gently, and this time he took her hand, "I will listen to anything you wish if you will only say it yourself. Please don't be so upset, dear."

For a second she wavered, then with a pettish movement pulled her hand away.

"It is easy to say that now, when you have made me so miserable—you have no thought for me at



all—you are always making me miserable—you never had—no—I've nothing to say—I'm too upset." He stood upright swiftly, his eyes hard, his face set.

"Very well. Then I will not distress you further. Good night."

He glanced round the room, met his brother's eyes, and went out, leaving an awkward silence behind him, which Lord Henry was the first to break.

"Really this is very distressing!" he remarked, vaguely sympathetic with the culprit. "What is it all about? Why are you so vexed with Desmond?"

"Why?" His wife's voice in anyone of less exalted position would have been called shrill. "My dear Henry, don't be an idiot! Desmond has behaved atrociously! He has been going everywhere with that dreadful young woman and——"

"Aunt Clarissa!" Eve's voice, quiet but decided, interrupted. "Madge Cardew is a friend of mine. Please don't speak of her in that way; and as I'm going on to a dance I think I'll say good night too. Good night, mother; good night, Uncle John."

She rose with a quick glance at Peter, who had not opened his lips, kissed her mother who was tremulously drying her eyes, kissed Lord Henry, for whom she was exceedingly sorry, and included the other two by a little smile and nod. She longed to see Desmond again, but she had not the least

idea where he was, and would not ask, for fear he would prefer to be alone. Before she left the house, however, she wrote a little note for him and gave it to a servant to deliver, then followed Peter out to the car more disturbed than she had thought possible.

Her exit was the signal for a general departure, and within a few minutes everyone had left, Lady Henry for home, and Lady Clere going with her brother-in-law Lord John to a political reception at the Prime Minister's, her tears and distress forgotten equally with her son's misdemeanours.

Left alone at his own request, Easton made his way to the smoking-room, and lowering himself into one of the great chairs drawn invitingly near the fire, waited for his brother's return. He had ascertained from Parkes, the butler, that Desmond had left the house; but he knew he would wish to see him sooner or later; and picking up *The Times* he tried to interest himself in its contents. Not very successfully though, for the evening's happenings had stamped themselves upon his unwilling memory; and when the door opened he spoke without looking round, immensely relieved at Desmond's arrival.

"Hullo, Desmond! Come and have a smoke, old fella!"

"It's not Desmond," said a feminine voice, "it's me."

Twisting round, Easton saw his young sister



wrapped in a sky blue quilted silk dressing-gown, her nut-brown hair loose round a face flushed with sleep. He spoke amazedly:

"Stella! You! Why, what do you want?"

"I wanted Desmond," Stella said crossly, stretching her hands to the fire. "He asked me to do something for him, and said he'd come to my room about ten. It's nearly a quarter to eleven."

"He's gone out," Easton said, picking up his paper again. "You'd better go back to bed and tell him in the morning."

Stella yawned.

"Brothers are a nuisance; at least, you're not. But it's too bad of Desmond. Are you alone?"

"It looks like it," Easton said, with a little smile.

"Don't be silly! I asked because I want to stay a little and get warm."

She curled up on the broad cushioned top of the low fender, and began to talk, till Easton, listening anxiously for Desmond, heard footsteps, and his brother's voice speaking to a servant, and promptly interrupted her in the middle of a dissertation on governesses.

"Here's Desmond. Get along to bed, Stella. He will not want to see you to-night."

"But," Stella was protesting loudly, "you don't understand, Easton. I want to see *him*." And she slipped out of reach of Easton's hand and rushed to the door as Desmond opened it.

"There—I've got you! I waited hours to tell you about—Desmond!"

For Desmond had started back with a stifled exclamation and a movement of his clenched hand that made Stella shrink back and stare with eyes slowly darkening and mouth that set hard to hide a quiver. It was Easton who spoke, for Desmond, who usually was so indulgent a brother, simply walked past her and dropped into a chair with his back to the room.

"Stella, go to bed, dear. You can give your message in the morning."

Stella nodded, and, not without girlish dignity, made her escape, whereupon Easton pushed the tobacco over to his brother and began to stuff a pipe for himself.

It was Desmond who spoke first.

"Can you spare me an hour or so, Easton? I want to talk to you."

"All night if you like, old fella," was the answer. "Light up first. That's right. Now go ahead."



CHAPTER II

THE Rector of St. Peter's, Mayfair, came out of his chair and drew a quick breath of relief at the fresh coldness of the outer air. Lent was two weeks on its way, services were frequent and crowded, he was fasting even more than his custom was—and he was ever a spare eater—and the conjunction of all had to-day given him a racking neuralgic headache. The church standing in the heart of Mayfair, faced down a street that led out directly of that in which it stood, and ran westward, and as he drew the heavy door behind him, his attention was caught by the glimpse of the sunset sky behind the bare trees of the Park. A flaming crimson fading into lilac and amber, with fine parallel lines of cloud edged with fiery rose crossing it, and above a pale pure blue touched here and there with the gold of the first stars. There was frost in the air and the little plane-trees about the hoary grey walls of St. Peter's were still as though carved in stone, the shadows were very hard, and in the clear light buttress and carving stood out sharply. St. Peter's was a beautiful church both outside and in, and in this late afternoon light it appeared to possess the one beauty it lacked—that of age. The Rector stood a moment looking at it,



admitting as he always did, the fine lines and proportions, then he turned to the south, and walking rapidly was in a very few minutes in Piccadilly. He wanted some tobacco; the shop he usually dealt with was near Prince's, and just as he was entering a voice said:

"Hullo, old chap, wait for me!"

Wheeling sharply round he found himself confronted by a man several years his junior, exceedingly well dressed, and walking with the aid of two sticks—William Cardew, his half-brother.

"My dear boy, I didn't see you. I'm sorry. Where are you off to?"

"Lowndes Street, so I'll walk with you if you've no objection—Pauline arrives about six, doesn't she? I saw her for about one minute last Tuesday when she came up to that matinee, but it was so like her to go careering down to see grandfather."

"I have not seen her at all yet," Raven Cardew said. "That was the day I went down to Winchester. I'm just going to get some tobacco—will you wait?"

"Of course."

Billy leaned back against the wall as his tall brother went over to the counter, and stood looking out at the seething traffic. It was Friday afternoon, the first bright day after nearly a week's rain, and flood-tide in Piccadilly. Carriages, taxis, motors, buses, tradesmen's carts, and newsboys' bicycles—some with their lamps early lit, looking



pale and odd in the last daylight, all were passing and meeting in a kaleidoscope of colour and eager motion.

It was an inspiring sight to a man whose work held him in a lonely and pestilentially unhealthy spot in Africa, and Billy, still lame from the last great offensive of the war, was in no hurry to leave it. He loved it all, the noise, the hustle, even the smell of the petrol and the crowding aimless idlers, who got in everybody's way and persisted in walking along the wrong side of the pavement.

Raven came towards him as he thought of this, and he moved.

"Ready? 'Fraid I shall keep you back a bit."

"That doesn't matter. It's good to be out of doors."

"Yes. Don't you get fed up with services now and then?"

Raven looked down upon his step-brother—he was a very tall man—and a flicker of amusement crossed his grey eyes.

"No, I can't say that I do . . . the only thing I get 'fed up' with is being indoors so much."

"H'm. I couldn't be a parson. Raven, old man, don't you ever wish you'd chosen something else? Don't you sometimes want to kick over the bally traces and clear out?"

Raven was silent a moment and his brother went on with a wave of his hand towards the Berkeley Hotel that they were just passing.

"That sort of thing, for instance. Dancing, light music, frivolities, any old thing, and pretty women. Own up!"

The elder man's clever face hardened; almost unconsciously his left hand clenched in his overcoat pocket and his fingers of the right resting lightly on his brother's arm gripped till the younger man hardly checked an exclamation. That grip gave him his answer, and without waiting for words he changed the conversation.

"Saw Madge lunching at the Carlton grill. Tells me they have decided to take that house in Wilton Crescent. She was in a desperate hurry, as she was playing at some big charity show at the New Theatre—scene from Paolo and Francesca."

Raven nodded.

"Beautiful play. Who is her Paolo?"

"Desmond Harbyn, and by Jove he's good. I saw 'em rehearse one day last week and I tell you he's the last word. You know what a fine voice he's got anyway—and act! He acts jolly well—too well. Well, I must leave you here—I'm going on to the Winstanleys'. See you later, old fella."

They parted, Billy to limp northwards, Raven to walk rapidly along towards South Audley Street where his rectory was.

Raven Cardew, only son of the late Sir Francis Cardew, knight, by his first marriage, had inherited his mother's fortune, and his father's brains, but instead of following that father's footsteps as he



had at first intended, had entered the Diplomatic Service, he had first studied art in Paris, had knocked about the United States, and surprised everyone by suddenly deciding to take Holy Orders. He was ordained at the age of twenty-nine, at thirty-five he was presented with a living in the drab respectability of a London suburb, at forty his preaching had attracted attention so far beyond his immediate sphere that he was constantly asked to visit West-end Churches, and when the Rector of St. Peter's, Mayfair, died, he was offered the living.

He had been rector now for two years, and the church was one of the most crowded in London. He was a wealthy man, but St. Peter's needed wealth, for there was no endowment, no pew-rents, and the expenses were very heavy. The lease of the house near by falling in, Molyneux had bought it and turned the one he had occupied previously over to his curates for a clergy-house, and he himself kept his home for the children of his father's second marriage and his charming, talkative, frivolous stepmother.

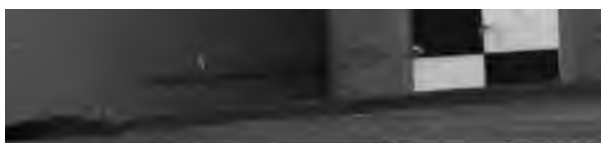
He detested the appellation, but was known to the world as a ritualist, and was described by his youngest undergraduate brother as "spike"; in other words he taught and practised the doctrines of the Catholic Church and objected strongly to the term "Protestant." Loving music and knowing a good deal about it, he paid his organist a high

salary from his own pocket, and demanded an equally high standard of music in the church; his three curates he worked hard, but not quite so hard as he worked himself, and if in his own home all was order, beauty, even some luxury, his own personal life was austere and his charities as secret as they were far-reaching. He was deeply compassionate beneath his rather cold manner and he preferred a bold sinner to a hypocrite.

He reached the rectory just as the swift winter dusk blotted the colour out of the sky, a big square red-brick house standing with others a little back and facing, like the church, down a short wide street that ran westward to the park three hundred yards or so distant. There in Park Lane the flood of traffic surged by, lamps and head lights glowing, and the roar of its passing coming to his ears like the roar of the sea, as he fitted his latch-key into the lock; but as he stepped inside and closed the door, the roar died away to a distant murmur and he was in a different world.

The house was old and very strongly built—also having been erected in the days when space was not so valuable it spread backward and sideways instead of upwards, and Raven had done well to buy it.

The wide and spacious hall was dull blue in colour, and hung with one or two fine pictures; the stairs went up at one side and branched after a short flight into two, to either side of the house; a



passage led through another little book-lined hall which had once been a room, to his study, and thither he went, passing through the heavy swing doors that shut him off from the rest of the house.

The hall, the stairs, the whole appearance of the house showed evidences of wealth and perfect taste, but the study once reached was different. It was lined with books, carpeted with a carpet so worn that the pattern was indistinguishable; there was a huge plain writing table, wooden chairs, a big equally plain mahogany cupboard to lock, and one worn and shabby armchair pulled up near the fire, with a little table bearing matches and a tobacco jar at its elbow.

There were no pictures—the books did not admit of them, but in a corner, sheltered from the doorway and hidden by the end of one of the big fitted-in bookcases, was a large crucifix, the figure and cross both carved in stone. This had been a gift from a friend long since dead, the work of one of the greatest sculptors of modern days, and was a wonderful piece of work, with its strained and tortured limbs, its sense of uttermost physical suffering and the expression of the face in startling contrast—august in its peace.

Raven looked at it now—he never entered or left the room without looking—and taking off his coat and hat hung them in a cupboard that led out of the room, and slipped into a short coat. Although he had not spoken of it to Billy, he felt tired

almost to exhaustion, and after dinner he had a guild meeting to address in the Parish room adjoining the clergy-house. One of his curates had begged him to leave it, but it was a special meeting, and the members would expect the rector and no-one else. He was preaching a course of sermons at St. Anne's, Soho, on Thursday evenings, a course at his own church on Fridays as well as Sundays, and had innumerable addresses and classes to give and hold during the week, as well as his visiting in his own parish, and two afternoons weekly at St. Bride's Hospital, Knightsbridge, the great grey pile that was open night and day.

It was just five o'clock, and at a quarter to six one of the curates, Brian Hewlett, was coming to talk over some matter that perplexed him with regard to a member of the choir; at a quarter to seven the members of his boys' confirmation class would come, and an hour later he would have fifteen minutes to snatch a bath before dinner. At nine he would be at the parish room, and when he returned there would probably be several letters demanding an immediate reply. He was burning the candle at both ends, rising to celebrate Holy Communion every morning at seven, and in response to Mrs. Cardew's fluttering protests and Billy's occasional anxious questions, promised to do less when Lent was over.

"Promise you'll take a holiday then!" Billy grumbled. "If I haven't gone, come over to Italy



and let's mooch round and lie in the sun. You want it."

Yes, he wanted it; no one quite knew how much; but he was a man who kept his own counsels, and even Billy, dearly as he loved him, knew little of his inmost heart.

Tall, broad of shoulders and lean of limb, William Raven Cardew would have made a magnificent athlete if he had not been a priest, and in his face, worn, just now, almost haggard, with close-shut rather hard mouth, deep-set eyes and hawk-like nose, was something of the Red-Indian type—inscrutable, yet terribly alive.

Like all popular preachers he had to endure a certain amount of foolish adulation; and sentimental women, stirred by his sermons or his personality, strove to gain more of his attention and time than he was willing to give, but his cold reserve chilled in a way no deliberate reproof could have done, and shielded him from any real annoyance. He devoted himself to what he believed to be his duty, and his respect of persons was very slight.

He usually had a cup of tea in his study, but to-day his step-sister, Pauline de Fleurian, widowed in the first year of the war, not seen since her marriage, nine years ago, was arriving home. She had been staying some days since her arrival in England with her grandfather at his house in Hampshire, and Billy had said she had come up

to the matinee in which Madge Cardew—a sister-in-law—was acting, but perhaps she might be home by now. If so he must welcome her, so, after a hasty wash and brush in the little cloak-room by his study, he left his own small wing and entered the other part of the house. Somewhere in the distance he could hear a piano. Henrietta, his youngest step-sister, assiduously practising! Bach, number one. Italian concerto—he paused a moment to hear the lovely freshness of the notes—but otherwise the house was very quiet, the grave ticking of a grandfather clock somewhere on the stairs being distinctly audible.

As he stood there a ring at the door brought the old manservant up the lower stairs, and Raven hastily retreated into a doorway, not wishing to be caught by a caller; but a fresh voice said:

“Hullo, Mason, am I too late for tea?” and he came out of the dining-room, for it was only Dicky; and Dicky, the youngest of Sir Francis’ four sons, was nearly nineteen, rather short for his age, and very neatly built, fair of hair and complexion, and going through a stage of exquisite dandyism.

Seeing his brother, he flung his coat to the butler and seized Raven by the arm.

“Out of your shell for once, you old oyster?” was his greeting. “How d’you like this suit? Anderson tells me they have just made one identically like it for the Prince. Some suit? What?”



"Certainly. Very smart, indeed," Raven said, with a faint smile. "I like grey. Did I hear you ask for tea? Then you can give me some."

Dicky flung open the drawing-room door and switched on the lights. The room was empty, save for a large blue Persian cat lying along the hearth, and Raven hardly checked a little sigh of relief. His step-mother was not quite the company he needed just now, and it was evident that Pauline had not yet arrived.

Mason brought in tea and Dicky poured out, chattering of a dance he was going to, and bewailing the austerities of Lent, as only bread and butter was to be seen on the tea-table.

"Such a bore—old Lady Wrayne won't let Doris go to Ciro's in Lent, and even Sybil Harbyn isn't going to dances. Absurd—oh, I beg pardon, old man! Hanged if I didn't forget!"

Raven nodded.

"I shouldn't," he said. "It isn't very much to give, is it?"

"What, Lent? No, I suppose not, if you look at it that way. If we were Roman Catholics we'd jolly well have to, of course. Wonder where mother is? Oh, I remember; it's some big bazaar at the Albert Hall for the Blinded Soldiers or something of the sort. There's a fuss for you. Why can't they give the money and be done with it? The soldiers 'ud benefit a good deal more."

"People are willing to be charitable if they can

derive excitement from it," Raven said, rather curtly. "And some people actually do enjoy that kind of thing."

"Mother does." Dicky grinned and swung one scarlet silk-ankled foot to and fro. "She's fluttered off to-day pretending it's because Henrietta is in the tableaux, but Henrietta's back, for I heard her playing. Really, mother wants to buy a lot of things she doesn't care for, and she hopes she'll win a raffle or two. My lord! What an ambition! And she'll engage herself ten deep for all the other rotten shows like it, and come home thoroughly happy. And Henrietta'll design more odd clothes and paint more weird portraits of her friends and be thoroughly happy too! Thank Heaven I wasn't born a girl. I say, you look pretty done in."

"I've a stupid headache. It's nothing."

"Headache?" Dicky surveyed him curiously, for headaches were beyond his ken. "It must be gettin' up at such an unearthly hour. What d'you do it for? Why don't you let t'other fellas do it instead?"

Raven's eyes smiled though his lips did not.

"If I explained you wouldn't understand," he said. "At least, not in the ten minutes I have at your disposal. Ah! here is mother."

He rose as Mrs. Cardew entered, a still slender and very pretty woman, small and dainty as a doll,



with hair perfectly dressed and a complexion as delicate as a young girl's. She wore a very expensive fur coat, and was followed by the younger of her two daughters, Henrietta, aged twenty-one, who looked far less juvenile than her mother, and was certainly far less innocent of the world's wickedness.

With a little cry of pleasure Mrs. Cardew fluttered over to her step-son.

"Oh, Raven dear, how nice to see you for once behaving like a normal person, and leaving that horrid study alone! And has Pauline come? Not yet? Dear me, how disappointing! Dicky, do give me some tea, darling! I am quite exhausted, and I'm so afraid I've left some of my parcels behind. Raven! You're not going?"

"I must, I fear," he said, pausing a moment at her cry of dismay. "Hewlett is coming to see me at a quarter to six, and I have some telephone calls to get through first. I am glad you had a pleasant afternoon."

"Dear me, what a pity! Henrietta, do come nearer the fire and let me show Dicky some of the things I bought. Look at that now!" She held up a dainty little frock for a child of three or four, and Dicky hooted.

"Who's that for? Me?"

"No, I just thought it might do for someone. It was so sweet I couldn't resist it—and this—and

this—" She went on displaying her purchases till Mason had taken away the tea, then just as a clock struck six he entered again, announced:

"Madame de Fleurian!" and Pauline came across the room.

Nearly two hours later, Raven, coming into the drawing-room, five minutes before dinner was announced, found his step-sister alone there, standing by the fireplace, one hand on the high carved shelf, slender in her sheathlike black velvet gown against which her arms, bare to the shoulder, and her lovely neck, looked ivory-white. He paused a moment, almost startled. When he had seen her last she had been a plump bride of eighteen, exceedingly youthful and shy. It was a woman young in years, yet no longer a girl in experience, who looked at him from out those wonderful dark eyes as he came across to her.

"You are Raven?" she said, half questioningly. "Do you not know me?"

She held out one hand and studied his face for a long moment; then suddenly she smiled and at that smile a curious little feeling of warmth seemed to wake to life into Raven's soul. "But it is good to see you again," she said; "and good to be home."

"I should not have known you," he said, looking down at her with unsmiling eyes and a little frown between his brows. "You are utterly changed."



She shrugged her shoulders with a little ironical foreign gesture.

"Life has changed me," she said. "I have seen—and known—strange things."

"And you come back to a London rectory? Well, after all, you will not find it different to other houses. I live chiefly in my own little wing and the clergy-house."

"It will interest me to hear about your work," she said, idly fingering the one ornament she wore: a long rope of pearls that hung straight down over the black chiffon velvet of her gown, lustrous and perfectly matched. Raven knew nothing of women's clothes, but his work taught him to know a good deal of women; and looking at the slender figure, a study in black and white, he realised how perfect the very severity of her appearance was; the unbroken lines of the velvet, held by a single strap over the shoulder, the dark hair knotted rather low, the classical line of the head and brow and those great dusky eyes. The frown on his face deepened; he realised that Pauline might prove a disturbing factor in a priest's house, for she epitomised the brilliant world from which she came,—the world of Paris, the Riviera, Algiers; the world which he also had once known so well.

They talked no more, for Mrs. Cardew came in; and during dinner he hardly spoke, but he was conscious several times that she was watching him, and that she was very much mistress of herself.

He excused himself before the end of dinner, and went off to take his Guild meeting; and remembering a book he wanted, went into his study to get it. The fire was low, the austerity of the room after the quiet luxury of the rest of the house was very apparent, and a chill struck him. It was cheerless and cold, and as he turned to go again, the book in his hand, he was conscious of a sudden distaste for what he had immediately to do, of a longing to throw work aside and go into the drawing-room and talk to Pauline. Pauline! Was she to be an influence dragging him away from the work he had taken up? His lips tightened till the face was set as a flint, and with a hasty movement he left the room and went out into the darkness.

With the coming of night the cold had strengthened, and now the stars were brilliant in a frosty sky, and the still air was biting. The sting of the cold on his face aided him to throw aside the enervating thoughts that had attacked him, but nevertheless the thing had happened: for the first time for twelve years he had found his work irksome, and the wish for a freer life had entered his mind.

At the entrance of the parish room he met his senior curate, Father Welby. He himself discouraged the title of Father, considering it belonged but to the avowed monastic orders, either of the Roman or English churches, but Robert Welby persisted in its use.

"Myers has been waiting to see you for fifteen



minutes," Welby said in his harsh voice. "You told him to be here at a quarter to nine. He was here at twenty to, and he's just gone, and I think he means to make trouble."

It was plain that the curate disapproved of his rector's behaviour in daring to be late, and meant to show it. Robert Welby was a small thin man with a bony high-bridged nose, piercing eyes and a bald high forehead. He was a good preacher, and, in his harsh way, a good man; but he had long desired a living which his Bishop did not present, and he was secretly jealous both of his rector's personality and position. He considered, too, that Raven was mistaken in his course of conduct; he himself lived in the clergy-house and took positive pleasure in making that life even more unattractive than it was. Outside the walls of the church he considered beauty in the abstract as unnecessary and dangerous, and beauty in woman as a positive evil. In fact he had no use for women at all; and while following the teachings of a Church that honours the Mother of Christ, his attitude was in reality that of a Mohammedan rather than a Christian, though had he been told so he would vigorously have denied it.

Once or twice he had spoken to Raven on the subject of living at the clergy-house, and the first time Raven had stated quietly enough that he considered it a duty to regard his home as the home of his mother and her children—the two youngest

being still under his guardianship. Welby had remarked on the inadvisability of a priest himself living, and permitting his family to live, in a beautiful house, and having the command of a large income while preaching the ideal of Christianity to his people; and Raven, holding in the anger that such remarks roused, had answered by stating that Mrs. Cardew and her children had money of their own, and were at liberty to spend it as they chose; as for his own income, the administration of that was his own affair, and as such he preferred not to discuss it.

Welby did not forget the snub, nor did he alter his opinion. He viewed Mrs. Cardew and her life with the utmost disapproval, and in the indefinable ways that are impossible to reprove openly, showed that disapproval. He followed his rector now into the little cloak-room ostensibly to get his biretta.

"I had better go and see him," he said, referring to the absent Myers, and Cardew throwing off his coat and hat and getting rapidly into his cassock, nodded.

"Yes, or I will. It is certainly unfortunate, but as he came five minutes earlier than I said, he might have waited till now. However, I will write to-night and see him to-morrow. Did you hear from the Bishop?"

"Yes. He said——"



They entered the room talking of some matter, then Welby went to the back and Cardew mounted the platform to address the young men who crowded the seats.

He left just after ten, and crossing the hall to go to his own rooms encountered Billy limping down the stairs. At sight of him he stopped.

"Could you spare me a few minutes?" he said. "I've a letter I want to speak to you about."

Billy's eyebrows went up.

"Me?" he echoed. "Right-o, certainly," but entering the study he shivered.

"How the devil—beg pardon—do you live in a place like this? Cold, hideous, uncomfortable. Why, Raven?"

Raven's eyes narrowed with that curiously intent yet remote look that Billy sometimes noticed and wondered at.

"A priest's life must not be an easy one," he said briefly. "Cigarette or tobacco? You see I'm not such an anchorite."

"Cigarette, thanks. But the things are there. You've plenty of money. What makes you deliberately cut yourself off from everything? You're not a monk, after all. Why treat yourself quite so harshly? Reasonable comfort is surely not wrong, even for a priest, if he harms no one in enjoying it. Why, even the Jesuits have more than this in their lives."

He checked himself abruptly; never before had he said so much, and that mask-like profile opposite did not encourage him to continue. Vaguely uneasy, yet refusing to take back what he had said, he awaited his brother's reply. It came in Raven's slowest, most level, tones.

"I find it best for me . . . and I should prefer not to discuss it." Then as if repenting a little of the curtness of the words he looked across at the younger man and smiled faintly.

"Forgive me—and give me your help in a matter. I want to speak about Lionel."

Billy stared. "Toby?" he said.

"Lionel or Toby—somehow I always think of him as Lionel."

"Yes. You are in his life more than I am. What is the reason of his behaviour?"

Billy answered the question by another.

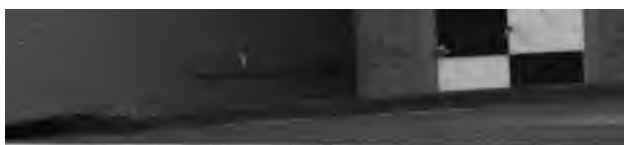
"What do you mean?"

The elder man looked down a moment gazing at the paper knife he had picked up. After a pause he looked up again and met Billy's keen gaze.

"Debts," he said briefly. "This is the third time in two years he has applied to me to pay his gambling debts."

"Debts? Gambling? Good lord!"

This time there was genuine amazement in Billy's voice. He had known Toby, like Madge, to be extravagant, but he had no idea that he played and lost heavily at cards. Such a fact



altered matters very considerably, and he was silent in sheer perplexity till Raven spoke again.

"I did not intend to speak of this matter to anyone, but when you told me that Madge and he proposed to come to dinner to-morrow, I thought it necessary to find out a little more in case he asked me for the money. I warned him the last time. I told him I could not countenance gambling, yet two days ago he wrote to me saying he must have two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand? Has he lost that? Since when?"

"Since last June, I imagine. He was deeply in debt then, and I told him he could have no more at present. Has Madge no influence over him? What is she thinking about?"

It was on the tip of Billy's tongue to say:

"Desmond Harbyn!" but he bit back his words.

"I don't think Madge has much influence," he said. "She's a madcap and—I fancy Toby is madly jealous. You are sure he wants the money for card debts?"

"If it had been for anything else, surely he would have told me? He sent me that note by hand this evening. It's not marked confidential, you can read it."

He leant forward and passed the letter across—it was brief, but obviously written by one labouring under strong excitement—there was almost desperation in it, and Billy's face was stern as he

passed it back; only too well did he guess the reason of that need for two thousand pounds—and it was not for gambling debts.

"H'm. Well, as we're on the confidence question, I'll give you mine in turn. I don't think Toby wants that for card debts. I think he wants it for something very different. Has it occurred to you lately that Madge and he are not very happy? I think he's out for trouble. People have been talking—they always have talked about Madge—presumably they always will, but this time it's different. Madge has got herself talked about with a particular man and that man happens to be Desmond Harbyn. He played Paolo to her Francesca to-day . . . charity show at the New Theatre—I was there and saw Toby afterwards. He was frothing at the mouth over it, and though I tried to quiet him down he swore he'd make Desmond pay."

Silence answered him as Raven frowned at the fire; if this were true matters were complicated indeed. Lord Desmond and Billy had been in affection for each other, they had fought together through three years of Flanders mud, through the time's sand and heat and flies, and now, his uncle, Lord Charles, was Dean of the family's most intimate friends. After a while he spoke.

"Do you think Lionel is

"Heaven knows! Desm

himself open to gossip, but he's a good chap, but Madge is a fascinating little devil, and damn it all I don't know what to think! But the two families are so intimate that it's a dirty trick if it's true. I can't believe Desmond can be such a blackguard."

"The thing that matters is that Lionel thinks he can," Raven remarked dryly. "Has he said anything to Madge?"

"Dunno. We shall soon see if we keep our eyes open."

Raven nodded; he had meant to discuss the matter of Toby's expenditure more thoroughly, but Billy's information had changed the current of his thoughts, and when his brother had gone he sat staring with widening eyes.

CHAPTER III

PAULINE spent most of her morning unpacking, went out with Henrietta to luncheon, and at half-past four, having heard that Madge had called, went into the drawing-room. To her surprise she found not only her sister-in-law, but Raven, whom she had not seen that day, and as she entered he rose from his chair and looked across the room at her with those strange narrowed eyes of his.

She greeted Madge who looked smarter than usual, and going across to her step-brother held out her hand.

"Good morning—and good afternoon. I did not expect to see you here."

He took her hand for a minute, bent his head slightly and moved a chair forward for her, but he did not tell her that he had broken through his rigid custom, because he knew she would be there; he hardly admitted it to himself.

"Is your headache better?" she asked in a lower tone, and the question surprised him enough to make him give her a quick searching glance from the eyes that usually betrayed nothing of his thoughts.

"How did you know I had a headache?" he demanded.

"Dicky told me. I thought you looked ill and I enquired. Lent is a trying time for you."

He made no reply; although head of the household he lived his own life so entirely apart from it that such an enquiry was unheard of. The family were immersed in their own interests, he in his. It was a recognised thing that their affairs must not interrupt his, that certain rules must be observed—for instance, no dances to be given in Lent and Advent; but for the rest, Raven lived as much removed as though indeed he abode at the clergyhouse as Welby so ardently desired.

Pauline had not as yet had time to become acquainted with the routine; she noticed indeed that Raven went his own way, as of course he must; she also noticed that no one seemed to care what that way was, and his worn face with those curious eyes and set thin lips shocked her. He did not look physically ill; he was too well built, too muscular in a lean hard way for that; but he looked as though some great suffering had long ago stamped its mark upon him and left him to eat his heart out till that heart was nearly dead within him.

She smiled a little to herself now at her own imaginings with regard to him, and looking at him as he stood near, realised that he was no weakling and felt interested accordingly. She detested weakness in man or woman; it was indicative of her own fine courage that it seemed to her a car-

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dinal sin, responsible for half the misery in the world, and during her eight years of married life she had seen a good deal of it.

Then suddenly a sharp exclamation caught her attention in the general conversation, and looking up she saw Toby had come in. He looked sullen, his face was flushed, and his mother looked at him in bewilderment at his interruption.

"I said that Lady Eve was coming to dine to-night," she said, her pretty brows lifted above amazed blue eyes. "What is the matter, Toby?" for Toby was on his feet, that dark flush deepening in his face.

"If Eve Wilmot or anyone of her family enters this house, I leave it!" he exclaimed loudly. "I've finished with the Harbyns—or very nearly, and you may as well know it now as later."

His voice was loud and thick, cutting through the hum of conversation with disconcerting suddenness. Instantly everyone stopped talking and Madge cast him one quick apprehensive look. Before she could speak, however, Pauline was answering him.

"Toby, what do you mean? Eve is a friend of mine—she's invited to dine—you know her so well. What possible harm can she have done you that you speak so?"

"She's one of the Harbyns—that's enough for me. If she comes I go—and Madge goes with me."

Pauline looked suddenly across at Raven, and he answered the look by speaking quite quietly.

"My dear Lionel, you are rather unreasonable," he said. "Lady Eve Wilmot is your mother's guest, and your sister's friend. You and Madge are both dining here and I must ask you to treat her as your fellow-guest."

Toby's eyes, bloodshot and furious, met his step-brother's, and pushing his chair back so roughly that it fell over, he struck his hand on the table.

"I don't care whose guest she is; I will not stay here to meet her and Madge *shall* not——"

"Then——" Raven, too, rose and a dangerous spark leaped into his eyes, "I must ask for a reason for your extraordinary behaviour."

Wheeling round, Toby flung out his hand with a gesture towards Madge, who up to this moment had sat watching him in silence.

"An explanation?" he cried. "Ask her! Ask my wife why I will not meet a member of the Harbyn family. Ask her why I brought her here to-night? You won't? Then I'll tell you. It is because Desmond Harbyn is her lover—because she's chosen to give herself to him, because he and she have thought me a fool. I've brought her here because I don't choose she shall spend any more hours in his arms—now will you be content?"

For a moment absolute silence fell, a tense dreadful silence. Billy made a movement as if to

speaking, but checked himself. Pauline moved almost unconsciously to Madge's side, Henrietta stared at Toby, flushed, and began to fidget, disconcerted, yet curious, and looking from one to the other.

Meanwhile Madge, her face as white as Toby's was crimson, her eyes black and dilated, stood staring at him. Just as the silence was becoming impossible, she spoke.

"So that is why you desired me to give up my engagement to-night and come here instead? I congratulate you on your courtesy to your mother and brother. Raven, may I ask you to order my car?"

Raven made an almost imperceptible sign to Pauline, who stood nearest the fireplace. She rang the bell, and when a maid appeared he looked at his sister-in-law.

"Tell Mrs. Lionel Cardew's chauffeur to bring the car round at once."

Madge flushed him one look of gratitude, but Toby started forward.

"The car—you've ordered the car? What the devil do you mean? Do you think you're going back to spend the night with him, and I'm going to stay tamely here? You shall not go, d'you hear me? I'll not permit it! I'll——"

Raven's voice struck through the furious words.

"Since you cannot be decent," he said, "you had better be silent."



Stammering and incoherent, Toby turned on him.

"You seem determined to interfere with my wife," he cried thickly. "Perhaps you, too, are her lover, with your piety and celibacy! Why not?"

There was a half-stifled oath from Billy, and a quick involuntary movement from Pauline towards Raven, and for one instant Toby held his ground. Raven's eyes, usually so cold, blazed in a face white with fury. For that one moment there was murder in his look, as though long centuries of civilisation had slipped from his soul. Then with a tremendous effort he controlled himself enough to speak, though his voice shook.

"Madge—I will ask your pardon for the insult my brother has offered you. Please understand how deeply I regret it."

She nodded, startled for once out of all her daredeviltry, and, Pauline beside her, went swiftly out of the room. Once out in the empty hall, Pauline bent and kissed her.

"My poor dear—I wish you could stay. Oh Madge—can I do nothing?"

"Nothing! You're a darling—but I want to be alone. I can't stay here in the same house with him—I should stifle—or kill him. If this is the end I'm glad! glad! glad!"

She broke from Pauline's hands and darted out to the waiting car, threw an order to the amazed and sulky chauffeur, and slammed to the door.

The next moment the big car slid round the corner of the street out of sight.

For a moment Pauline stayed where she was, grateful for the icy cold of the outer air, till a pang of anxiety shot through her, and crossing the hall swiftly, she went back to the drawing-room, opened the door, and stood for a second. Then she closed it very quietly and went forward. Raven, white and rigid, stood by the mantelpiece, Dicky on the edge of his chair was looking straight in front of him, Mrs. Cardew had disappeared, and Henrietta at the further side of the room stared with dilated eyes to where Billy stood beside Toby, who had collapsed into a chair, and with arms sprawling across the table was filling the room with dreadful sounds,—the strangled, choking sobbing of a man gone utterly to pieces.

At Pauline's entrance Billy looked up, and something of relief crossed his haggard face; at a sign from him she came across to them and spoke very low:

"For God's sake get Raven out of the way. I'll see to Toby."

She nodded, though she had no idea how she was to do it; and as she went across to him she saw Billy bend down and lay his hand on his brother's shoulder, heard him speak a little hoarsely, but in a voice that meant to be obeyed:

"Toby! Here, stop it, old fella. Toby, don't be a damn fool!"



As she touched his arm Raven turned to her, and his lips scarcely moved as he spoke:

"What do you want?" he said.

"I want you; please take me out of this. It is —unpleasant."

Without a word he went to the door, opened it and let her pass out; in the hall she paused.

"My sitting-room, your study is too cold. Please come with me."

He could not refuse without positive rudeness, and he followed her to a small room at the back of the house that had been set apart for her, and which she had just that afternoon begun to arrange. Another time its atmosphere and rather grave beauty would have pleased him, but now he could think of and feel nothing but those words hurled at him by his brother, words that wiped out the years and brought back memories he had fought and prayed to forget. And Pauline, as he sat down mechanically in the chair she indicated, saw something in his face that warned her to be careful how she handled the situation.

She switched off all lights except a shaded table lamp, put cigarettes and matches at Raven's side, and sitting down in a low chair near the fire leant forward, chin on hand. She had come to a sudden decision and wished to act upon it before her resolve wavered.

"If you have a little while to spare before dinner I should like to talk to you," she said. "About

myself, not Toby. This miserable business has brought it so vividly before me and, foolishly perhaps, I feel I need someone to whom I can speak. You are used to people's troubles, Raven, are you not?"

He forced himself to attention, and she saw it. "Yes," he said.

It was not an encouraging monosyllable, but she seemed content, and with eyes remote and low level tones she began to speak.

"You remember how young I was when I married Phillip de Fleurian, just eighteen, and a far younger eighteen than even Dicky. I knew nothing of life, nothing of men. Phillip soon taught me. He was a man who did not desire a wife but an ornament in his household, who found companionship in other ways, love"—she made a little gesture of scorn—"where he paid for it. He wanted me to entertain for him, to give him an heir, to give him a certain respectability. Yes, just that. His affairs were becoming too blatant even for the society he affected, and a wife argued a certain returning stability. He was generous with money because money meant nothing to him, but he respected neither God nor man—and least of all woman! He was quite willing for me to have lovers as he had mistresses, always on the understanding that no breath of scandal stirred, and to a young girl with ideals and much affection,



such gospels were almost soul murder. When my little son was born he was proud and delighted, but very soon he began to say how he would educate him, how he would show him life, ah!"—she shuddered, despite herself, remembering just what Phillip had said of the little innocent child she adored—"and knowing him, I began to dread the future in a way I had never dreaded it. You understand there was no active cruelty, no physical mis-use, it was just degradation of soul, the gradual soiling of everything beautiful and good in the world, the poisoning of the wells. Then the boy died. I thanked God then, but now, now it is different."

She had started to talk of herself because of the look she had seen in his eyes, because she realised instinctively that he had received a deadly hurt; because nothing but the hearing of another's injury would withdraw his attention from that unknown evil that had him in its grip. But she had miscalculated her own strength. It had been comparatively easy to speak of Phillip, she had believed herself capable of speaking calmly of little Gaspard; but she had been mistaken. Breaking off her level recital of those past years, she clasped her hands together and looked ahead of her with eyes black and dilated, and a throat that swelled and ached with unshed tears. Her little son! The tiny dimpled thing with his clinging hands

and silky tender head, and a smile on his face as he lay in his little coffin, a smile so different from the baby laughter she knew.

With a quick intake of her breath she bent her head and covered her face, fighting for the self-control upon which she had depended, and Raven watched her but did not move. After a minute she lifted her head again, her face calm.

"It is foolish to grieve after all these years. He would have been seven. I cared for nothing for a while, and I think I shall always hate Egypt, because it was there we went. Then after a while I met a woman. She was very wealthy and very attractive. I heard she had been one of the most brilliant singers of the younger ranks, that a great future had lain before her, and for some reason she gave it all up. I did not learn why. I do not know even if the rumour was correct. But she saved me, not from anything foolish. I do not mean suicide, or anything like that, but from something worse,—without her I should have let everything go, should have tried to forget. Do you understand? She had suffered. I knew that, and she had won out. She had many friends, and was much sought after, and we formed a close friendship. She had a villa close to mine, and we saw much of one another. She went to America last year, and died soon after. She did more for me than anyone has ever done. I have talked too



much about myself, but my own memories swept back upon me."

She broke off, pressed her fingers over her eyes in a gesture he was soon to know well, and smiled a little.

"Memory plays one cruel tricks, doesn't it, Raven? You have been very patient. And now, what is going to happen about this affair? What do you think they will do?"

Raven got up; his sister's story, detached and only too usual as it was, had moved him and withdrawn his thoughts from himself as she intended it should. His anger against his brother had died down, although the pain those furious words had caused still stung, because they had awakened memories within his own mind as well as within Pauline's. He wanted to take Pauline into his arms and kiss the tragedy from her eyes; he wanted to assure her of his sympathy and love for her, his desire to help and shield her from further pain, but he dared not. He had stifled his affections too long for him to risk giving way to them now, had hungered for the love he had once thrown away, too bitterly to risk being misunderstood or repulsed. Yet she was his father's daughter—surely she would understand? For the first time for years he felt a desire to break through the habit of silence and tell her what he had never told a living soul, a longing to pour forth all the pain

and loneliness and bitter remorse that dwelt far down in his heart. And the desire and longing was so strong that it nearly conquered.

Looking down at her as she sat gazing into the fire, his lips parted, his eyes dilated, and he made a sudden movement towards her. Had she looked up then he would have given way utterly to that passionate desire, have broken a silence of thirteen years and eased mind and nerves of a burden that was racking them, but she did not look up. Instead, she spoke again, meditatively, as if thinking out her words:

"Madge is so erratic, such a butterfly, but she is not vicious. She does foolish things, not wicked ones; and Toby is all wrong, too, he is blinded by jealousy and hurt pride."

Her words gave Raven the one thing he needed—time; and he fought back the weakness that had threatened to overwhelm him. When at last he spoke his voice was level and quiet as usual:

"You are right I think. Madge never stops to consider, and Toby is not too wise in his dealings with her. But there is the possibility that he will not listen to reason. If Billy cannot make him, no one can."

Pauline rose, tucked her handkerchief into the breast of her gown, and stood for a moment looking up at him.

"Raven, you look tired, more than tired, worn out. If there is anything I can do to help you, will

you let me do it? We are brother and sister, and I think you are not very happy. I will not intrude, but I think——”

She broke off and laid slim fingers on his arm. On the middle finger of her right hand was a great square emerald of wonderful purity and colour, and the wonderful jewel attracted him; and after a moment she spoke again:

“If you ever feel the need, remember, I am here,” she said. “And if I am a prey to foolish imaginings, forget all I have said—ah—yes, Mason?” for the door had opened and the old servant stood at it, his face perplexed.

“Lady Eve Wilmot is here, madam,” he said, “and it is after eight. Shall I sound the gong?”

“Yes, yes. I’ll come.”

He turned away, and she spoke more lightly:

“Civilisation demands we dine, and talk, and keep our own counsel,” she said. “Good bye, big brother. I do not expect I shall see you alone again to-night.”

Deliberately she lifted her face, for one second he hesitated, then almost roughly he caught her arms above the elbows, held her and looked down into her eyes, and for the first time she saw the torment and pain in his own.

“Pauline!” he said, and quite suddenly his voice shook. “Pauline, don’t, don’t! I can’t—I——”

He turned his head sharply away; she felt him tremble, and a quick hot wave of almost fierce

sympathy for him flooded her. She turned her head and put her lips against his hand where it held her arm, and at the touch his fingers tightened her arms till they hurt. Then he as suddenly loosed his grip, and turning his back on her spoke shortly:

"Go in, please. I'll follow in a moment."

She went without a word, a strange little thrill of exaltation running through her; she had won the first stage in her determination to break down the icy barrier he had erected between himself and the world. He was like herself, utterly lonely, and the strong love of friends and kinship should comfort them both.



CHAPTER IV

EVE WILMOT was dining at the rectory for the purpose of having a really confidential talk with the friend she had not seen for five years; and as the invitation had been an informal one over the telephone that morning, she was not in the least surprised to find only the family, with the exception of Mrs. Cardew, present. Raven, contrary to his usual custom, talked well. Billy could always be relied upon for conversation, and Pauline, despite her anxiety, was as ever, an excellent hostess; yet Eve was conscious, or thought she was, of some underlying strain, and presently to test that impression spoke her brother's name carelessly:

"Desmond has gone off to Brighton for the week-end," she said. "He says he wants fresh air and long walks. He'll get the air, but Brighton!"

"Such a foul place!" Billy exclaimed, gazing at her with elaborate frankness. "I loathe it! Miles of streets and trams and shops, and Jews! Jews! Jews!"

"Lord Desmond went to the first place he thought of, I imagine," Pauline remarked. "It's always difficult to decide on a winter week-end in

England, and Brighton is as good as anywhere else."

"Yes, I suppose it is. I envy you your villa at Bordighere, Pauline! It must be a dream!"

She had learned what she wanted and switched the conversation away from her brother; and afterwards, alone with Pauline in the latter's sitting-room, she took a bold step.

"Pauline," she said, "have you seen your brother, Lionel, to-day?"

Pauline had been choosing a cigarette; she paused now, and lifting her eyes looked across at her friend.

"Yes," she said after a moment, "why do you ask?"

Eve did not answer immediately. She was sure now of the underlying tension, and although she did not desire to betray Desmond's confidence, she was desperately anxious to find out if anything further had happened between him and Toby. Her silence confirmed Pauline's belief that she, too, knew something of it, and so Pauline put out a feeler, as it were, and awaited comment, when she added:

"Toby was here before dinner."

"I thought so," was Eve's unexpected answer, "I saw Madge just after tea. She said he insisted on dining here to-night. And he's not here."

"No. He—changed his mind."

"Because he knew I was coming, and I am Des-

mond's sister. Oh Pauline—don't let us fence—it's too serious. You know—I can see by your face. Tell me what Toby is going to do."

Pauline uttered a stifled exclamation; Eve's tone and face proclaimed the truth she dreaded: that Toby's behaviour was not merely the result of a burst of jealous temper, but was a thought-out thing. Before she could make up her mind how much to say, Eve spoke again.

"Madge told me that Toby was furious over the show yesterday, that he told her quite plainly his belief that Desmond—my brother—was her lover, that there was a scene—and—he has already seen Desmond . . . that I know."

Pauline's hesitation vanished. It was evident that Eve knew the circumstances leading up to to-night, as well if not better than herself, and she might prove a very valuable ally if there was any hope of matters being straightened out. With a glance to see that the door was safely closed, Pauline began to tell Eve what had happened since tea-time, ending with Madge's departure; and Eve, thinking of her own interview with Desmond, realised that to hope for a reasonable and private settlement was useless.

Billy, Henrietta, and Dicky came in before they had much time to discuss the affair, and Dicky, who adored Eve, devoted himself to her, and brought a welcome touch of comedy into the evening by his youthful enthusiasm; but when Eve's

car was announced, and she went to put on her cloak, Pauline went with her, and they instinctively reverted to the subject that was occupying both their minds.

"Will you let me know as soon as you know yourself, what is going to happen?" Eve said. "I'm so worried about Desmond. When my father returns there'll be a terrible scene if—if Desmond is cited as co-respondent. And it's not true! Pauline"—her voice shook—"it's not true! I can trust Desmond's word utterly."

Pauline did not analyze her own relief at Eve's reiterated statement, she merely accepted it and promised to keep Eve acquainted, in so far as she was able, with her brother's movements, and they said farewell, Pauline returning, cheered, to the drawing-room, unaware that alone in her car Eve was trying and failing to find some comfort in the future. She loved Desmond devotedly, and added to her love was a great pride. She had always been proud of him, of his brains, his superb looks, his success with his fellow-men, even his success with women. All kinds and ages of women fell in love with him, and Eve rejoiced because it proved how altogether charming he could be if he chose. Her own pride of race, too, leaped to meet his. They had much in common, both loving life to the uttermost, yet preserving an aloofness with their fellows when the question of real intimacy arose, for Desmond, with all his power of attraction, was



not a man who made intimate friends or held himself cheap. Billy Cardew and his own brother, Nigel, were the only two who knew anything of the real self he hid behind that polished rather indifferent mask. The thought that such pride would be lowered, the secrets of his life dragged into the light of day, gloated over by the public, recorded in the press, was to Eve a dreadful thing. His interview with her after the scene in the club had warned her that should the worst happen and divorce proceedings be instituted, his defence, if defence he made, would be worse than useless.

She leant back against the cushions, the tears running down her face, staring un-seeingly at the empty streets and shining lamps, but before the brougham turned into Curzon Street, she sat up and dried her eyes; she was seldom moved to tears, and her weakness annoyed her. Also she did not wish to reveal the fact to Peter, who might possibly be at home when she arrived there.

As for Pauline, she went to her room early. She did not want to push her advantage over Raven, and equally felt unable to talk to Henrietta or Dicky, who would undoubtedly merely discuss over and over again the problem of Toby's conduct. But she had hardly entered her room before a knock came, and Billy's voice followed it.

"May I come in?"

Billy she did not mind, and at her quick reply he entered and sat down in a chair near the fire.

"Well, this is a holy show, isn't it?" he remarked. "Don't mind my cigarette? That's all right then. About the worst thing that could happen."

Pauline nodded.

"Where's Toby?" she asked.

"Went up to my room for a bit, then I persuaded him to stay the night, so he's asleep. I just looked in. Poor devil. I hate to see any man go to pieces like that, and when it's your own brother it's perfectly damnable . . . and yet it's half his own fault. He's been so jealous that he's driven Madge away from him. I must say I've thought all this last year that we'd have trouble with Madge. The thing that gets me is that the man she's pitched on is who he is. Desmond's a good fella."

Pauline's expressive mouth tightened, and Billy observing it added: "You don't agree with me? Well, it's true. I've known Desmond for sixteen years."

"I don't know him," Pauline said. "I have only spoken to him once. Isn't he too handsome to be immaculate?" Yet even as she spoke she realised how bitterly disappointed she had been in Lord Desmond, and how Eve's denial of his guilt had relieved her mind, and the realisation implying, as it did, more interest in him than in other men, disturbed her.

"I didn't say that, but I do say he's not the sort of man to take another fella's wife. Take my



word for it. Madge has always been a rackety little devil, and I expect Toby has pitched on the first man handy."

"He didn't tell you? Didn't explain anything more while—while I was seeing Madge off?"

Billy frowned.

"No. He stood and stared at the room after Madge had gone for a minute, then just broke up. Hullo! who's telephoning at this time of night?"

He went out of the room leaving Pauline suddenly tense; she felt suddenly and unreasonably as if a blow were coming, and as he came back into the room she knew her feeling was justified, for Billy's face was white, his eyes fierce and angry.

"Madge herself ringing you up from the Majestic, Brighton. She's joined him and chucked concealment to the winds. Lord, the little fool. We might have got Toby to behave sensibly, but now it's all U.P. The damn little idiot! Good night, Pauline—it's no use talking any longer."



CHAPTER V

FROST had given way to a fierce south-west-
erly gale, which, raging across the Atlantic,
drove huge seas on to the southern coasts, and left
destruction in its wake.

Desmond Harbyn, entirely oblivious of driving
rain and drenching spray, had walked along the
front till the paving ended and the rough beach
began, and now stood looking out to sea with eyes
that observed nothing of the tumbling, white-
capped water, and ears deaf to the roar and crash
of wind and waves. Every now and then a shudder
ran through him as if some memory tormented
mind and body alike, and his hands, buried deep
in the pockets of his old trench waterproof,
clenched and unclenched convulsively.

Four miles away back, along that endless stretch
of houses and hotels marring the coast, he had left
Madge Cardew lying back on heaped-up pillows,
with her dark curls making her look a mere child,
tumbling loose on the lace and ribbon and trans-
parent gossamer of her nightgown. The memories
of the night were poignant from her tempestuous
arrival, just after dinner, to the late, grey dawn
of the winter stealing in through half-curtained
windows; the scent of her hair, the clasp of her



arms about him, the storm and stress of emotion, and the last satiated weariness. A weariness that brought none of the much-needed rest, but only a dreadful self-knowledge—as it were, a light shining into the darkest recesses of soul, and showing the foulness hidden there.

He had risen just before nine, pleading the need of fresh air, and as he came through the vestibule of the hotel he caught sight of a woman entering the lift—she was of medium height, slender, very dark. For one dreadful instant he thought it was Pauline de Fleurian, and the shock of that thought stabbed his soul awake.

He went out blindly into the storm, fighting his way westward, trying to find relief in the freshness of the wind, and the beating of the rain on his face. He longed to plunge into the tumbling sea in the endeavour to cleanse himself from the memories in which his own weakness had steeped him, he felt polluted, he loathed his body and all it had done; shame burned him as though with fire, and ever and ever before his brain two visions arose—Madge Cardew, as he had seen her in the grey dawn, and Pauline de Fleurian's grave, pure face and great, black eyes that seemed to search his soul. Seen in the cold, clear light of morning, with the great clearness of wind and ocean around him, he looked within and could see no excuse. Love, the great purifier, had never lived between them. Love, if it be great enough, can hallow

everything from birth to death, but he had never loved Madge. He could not find extenuating circumstances in the thought that he had left her and had not intended to commit the final act of sin; sin had occurred long before in the kisses he had given, the thought to which he had allowed full play, the intimacies they had each known. Last night had been but the culmination of a series of sins, and he could find no comfort; he hated himself doubly now, for he felt traitor both to the woman he had wronged and the woman whom he knew now, too late, he loved.

"Whosoever looketh after a woman to lust after her in his heart——"

The stern words beat in upon his brain, judging and condemning in one; the wind shouted them, the roar of the waves, suddenly audible to his tormented nerves, echoed the same sentence. A violent hatred of the place where he had known the depths of shame swept in upon him; looking along the deserted shore to the East he fancied he could see the great pile of the Majestic, even though his common-sense knew it to be physically impossible, and he felt he could not endure to enter it again.

Mechanically, he turned to walk back, helped by the furious wind, conscious of overwhelming fatigue, and knowing that the barest decency forbade him to leave Madge until he had seen her again. He began to feel physically sick, and once he could hardly forbear lying down until the sensa-

tion passed; that he had had nothing to eat since dinner the night before, and had walked some miles in the teeth of a raging gale, after experiencing violent emotion, entirely escaped his memory. It was nearly one o'clock before he reached the hotel, and his dread that Madge would be in the vestibule added to his physical discomfort. One or two loungers turned to stare at him as he entered, and his pride alone kept him on his feet till he got to the lift. Fortunately, it was empty, and the porter being a reasonably human individual, seeing his face, suggested brandy. He shook his head.

"Take me upstairs," he said, and dropped on to the seat, hardly conscious when the lift stopped at the second floor. Yet habit held, and he reached his room to fall headlong in a dead faint just inside the door.

It was there his man, sent by the lift attendant, found him, and he struggled back to consciousness, with the sickly taste of brandy in his mouth and drops of water trickling through his hair.

Hargood's keen, fresh-coloured face was almost as white as his master's when Desmond opened his eyes, and at this sign of life he uttered an exclamation of relief, and held the cup of the flask once more to Desmond's lips.

"Drink another drop—just another—that's better—that's right," he was saying, in a voice shaken and persuasive, and the memories of those Flanders days held for the moment.

Desmond looked stupidly round; then returning consciousness brought returning memory, and he staggered to a chair, while deep relief appeared on Hargood's face.

"I thought you were dead, sure enough!" he said. "I—I beg pardon, m'lord."

Desmond passed damp fingers round his neck; shirt and collar had been opened, he felt wretchedly cold, and he watched Hargood close the windows and turn on the heat, with gradually growing impatience at his own weakness. For the moment mental suffering was in abeyance by reason of his physical discomfort, and as Hargood turned to him, he made an effort to pull himself together, touched by the man's desperate anxiety.

"It's all right, Hargood—don't look like that. It's my own fault—get me a hot bath—and dry clothes . . . and something to eat. I forgot all about breakfast."

An hour later he descended to the lounge, wrote a note and sent it up to Madge's room, then waited, pacing nervously up and down a little space at one side of the big vestibule.

Several curious glances followed him, his looks and figure, his clothes, and the fact that he was a well-known member of a famous family—all militated against the privacy he desired. It was evident, too, that he was not in a good temper; his snarl at a page-boy who ran against him, the frown and thin set lips all showed something was amiss,

and the idle people who observed him, naturally wondered what it was.

A porter brought the reply he waited for; tearing it open he read the few words it contained, and his brow grew black, and his eyes narrowed.

"Darling Desmond,

"Why go? I telephoned to Pauline de Fleurian last night, and Toby too. So you see I've decided to let everything go. I'll be down presently, and we can discuss things. Why not the Riviera?

"MADGE."

He crushed the paper between his fingers, his face setting white and hard; for a moment the porter positively quailed before the blaze in his eyes. Then he turned on his heel, and walking over to a distant window, stood staring out to the grey wrath of the sea.

Pauline de Fleurian—Pauline de Fleurian. The name echoed and re-echoed in his head till he could have screamed. That she should be the first person to be told what he had done seemed to him an exquisite irony. She—she—the woman with the pale face and the great dusky eyes—Pauline de Fleurian. Wife—widow—what was she? What did it matter? And Madge had told her!

A voice said his name, and he turned round to look down at Madge herself, just beside him.

"I was not long, was I?" she said. "What

shall we do, Desmond? And where? This place is like a monkey-house!"

She wrinkled her disdainful little nose, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Let's go for a drive," she suggested. "We really can't stop here."

"I don't want to drive," he said roughly. "As for stopping here—why did you come?"

It was brutal, and he was ashamed directly the words had passed his lips, but Madge did not trouble.

"What a bad temper you are in!" she remarked. "I came, my dear, for the same reason that I do anything else. I wanted to. And now I want to get away. Have you anything to say to that?"

"No," he said sullenly. "Where do you want to go?"

She glanced out at the sea and shuddered.

"I'd go to France if I needn't be sick," she said. "And I'd better be in London to-morrow morning to face my outraged family. Talking of families, yours will have a good deal to say to you, my dear!"

He gave her a quick look from between nearly closed lids.

"You take the prospect coolly enough," he said.

"But, of course! I choose to do it, and I never cared in the least what people said. I always found it didn't matter. It's worth it. But we can't discuss our next move in this place. Come

up to my sitting-room. Oh, yes, I've got one. I never stay in hotels without."

She walked beside him, chattering all the way, deliberately provocative, deliberately attracting attention, and he said no word till the door had closed behind them; then as Madge stopped talking, he spoke.

"You understand that this is the end? That you can't patch this up with Toby?"

She looked at him with raised brows, then laughed.

"I don't want to patch it up. I know what I'm doing."

"Do you, I wonder?" he muttered, looking down at her. "It's disgrace—social death——"

She interrupted him, flicking the ash from her cigarette into the fire.

"Oh, no, it isn't! I shall discreetly disappear for a little—then—afterwards, we can come back. We've too much money—and we're too attractive for the big world to be able to cut us; after a decent interval, of course. If you were just Mr. Jones or Mr. Robinson, a clerk in a bank, and I was a governess or a secretary—why, then, I agree it would be the end. The deep, dark, dismal abyss! But as it is me? My respected parent's million, and you—second son of the Marquis of Clere? Oh, no, my dear—you can put that right out of your head."

Her impudence, her assurance, and the knowl-

edge that what she said was perfectly true drove Desmond to fury, the cold fury that is worse than murder. His lips drew back over his teeth, and he thrust his head forward in the curious way that was oddly characteristic of him when angry, and spoke unforgiveable words:

"You seem quite as sure of me as of your future," he said.

For a second she flinched before the insult, then shrugged her shoulders and looked straight into his white, sneering face.

"Well—I can be, can't I?" she answered. "You are what is popularly known as a gentleman."

His hands clenched, and for a moment he breathed in gasps like a man who has made a tremendous, physical exertion; then he gained command over himself, though, as he spoke, his voice was a trifle thick.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose you can."

"Very well then, why look so like a tragedy hero? You're dreadfully intense, you know, Desmond. Just now you remind me of a Roman going to be martyred—wasn't there a play in the Dark Ages when I was a minute infant, called 'Quo Vadis'? Well, I am sure you must be exactly like the hero."

Baited beyond endurance he turned on her.

"You seem to regard this as a new kind of amusement," he said. "I don't find it so. Do you understand?"

She put her head on one side and regarded him with eyes that danced.

"You are really extraordinarily handsome when you're angry," she said. "And you are exceedingly angry now . . . Why?"

"Why?" He took a step towards her, hands clenched, head bent down and forward like an enraged animal. "Why? You can ask me that? My God! What are you? You've neither heart nor feelings, nor decency—you wreck a man's life and then laugh at him—you—you——"

"Desmond!" Her eyes flashed with a sudden gleam of temper. "You were quite as ready to play with me as I was with you—kindly remember that. As for wrecking your life, don't talk nonsense—no one can wreck a man's life but himself. You wanted amusement without paying for it. I wanted amusement, and I was willing to pay for it—that's the difference between us. Consequently, now the bill's presented I don't care, and you do. But you've got to pay all the same."

He stood quite still as she spoke, mouth set, eyes sullen and smouldering, and when she finished he drew back and stood looking down at her.

"Yes," he said at last, "I've got to pay, I admit that," and turning on his heel went over to the window and stood looking out.

As if she recognised that he would not bear much more, Madge relapsed into silence for at least ten minutes, thinking out her next move. When she

had quite decided she spoke again, her voice no longer full of mischief.

"Desmond, of course this means that Toby will take action at once. I imagine he'll leave the house to me—well, it's mine, he must . . . but I shan't stay in town this spring and summer. I think I shall go abroad. Algeciras first, and then Egypt or Algiers. Yes, Algiers. What shall you do? Will you come with me?"

He drew a long breath, and clenched his hands one in the other in a way he had when deeply moved; twice he passed his tongue over his dry lips, then at last he spoke.

"No, I shall get right away—till I'm wanted. I suppose you won't defend?"

That startled her. Swinging round she stared at the back of his broad shoulders.

"You won't come with me?"

"No——" turning, he faced her. "This is the end—till we marry."

"The end—till we marry?" she echoed. "Desmond! You'll leave me these next months? Why?"

"I shall not see you again until I am compelled to by the law," he said, ignoring her question. "If I am wanted for the case you know I will be there—and——" despite himself, his throat went dry, "I will marry you immediately the decree absolute is given. That is all. Now if you will



be good enough to tell me what you wish to do to-day, I am at your service."

She did not answer immediately, but sat gazing at him, her eyes very dark and bright as though considering something deeply. When at last she spoke there was a tone in her voice that, had he been less occupied with his own misery, might have conveyed to him a warning.

"So that is your decision? Very well. I understand . . . As for to-day . . ." She laughed suddenly, and rose with a little gesture that seemed to toss care to the winds. "It's clearing. We'll drive."

She went off to get ready, but he did not move, and when she returned he was still standing by the window twisting shreds of a cigarette between his fingers, staring at nothing.

Out of doors the rain had ceased, and the wind was tearing great rents in the scurrying masses of cloud, through which fugitive gleams of sun turned the waves from grey to green; the gale was dying down, and by the time they had driven twenty miles eastward the sky was brilliantly blue, with only ragged, white-tags of cloud to show the storm that had passed.

They drove all day almost in silence, till, just about tea-time, Madge made a sudden decision.

"We'll go to Dover," she said. "Dover. Carter—Estelle can pack all my things, and I can write

to Toby. Pauline will tell me what is happening. Pauline is a darling. I wish you knew her."

He stiffened like a man who has received a blow he must hide, and Madge, noticing nothing, went on talking.

"I was staying with her last Easter. She had a villa at Bordighere. Heavenly spot, and as she has perfect taste it's a joy to be there. You only met her that once at Eve's, didn't you?"

He nodded; his dry throat refused speech, and Madge shrugged her shoulders.

"Still sulky?" she enquired, peering at him. "I must say you are not ideal as regards temper. But I daresay you'll improve. You've had a trying day."

The mockery in her voice stung him on the raw. He threw his head back as if to avoid her closeness, lifting his hands with a curious gesture like a man who is losing consciousness.

The laughter and mischief died out of her eyes at the look that crossed his face, and she spoke sharply:

"Desmond—you're not well! What's the matter?"

Her quick anxiety showed her to be as nervy as himself underneath her excitement, and the knowledge re-acted and brought him to the realisation of his own behaviour. For that, there was no excuse, and not looking at her he spoke more in his natural voice.



"I'm all right. As you said, it's just a filthy temper . . . I am sorry . . . tell me exactly what you intend to do next, and if you can't, my help. You know I'll give it."

"Of course," she gave him a quick look. "But unless you come with me, there is no way in which you can give it."

"I can't do that," he said, wretchedly conscious of the true reason. "Surely you don't want me to."

"No," her tone was suddenly peculiar. "I don't really. But unless you do, your offer of service is rather empty."

As well as he could, in the fast-gathering dusk, he looked into her face.

"Madge," he said, sharply, "what do you mean?"

She saw her advantage and pressed it home.

"I mean that I shall be pitied for not being able to hold you after all. A man is not very ardent a lover if he is content to leave the woman after twenty-four hours when he need not."

Desmond made no answer, but stared ahead of him at the bare loneliness of East Kent, grey and flat under the rapidly darkening sky. He recognised Madge's claim upon him, knew she was right in what she had just said; if he left her now he left her in the lurch, yet to go with her was a violation of instinct as well as feeling. What had before been pleasant, even rather seductive, was now

repellent; her charm had ceased to attract him; her vivid personality was an annoyance, the passion she had shown was abhorrent to him. Yet, forced by her words to think over her position calmly, he realised that all this meant less than nothing. In the eyes of the world he had seduced her affections from her husband; yet there was another side to the picture. If he did not stay with Madge between now and the coming on of the case, where could he go? His home would be impossible, and Pauline de Fleurian was out of his reach as utterly as though he were the other side of the world. It was hardly likely that he would be able to exchange one word with her; she was, after all, the sister of the man whose wife he had stolen, and the very thought of him must fill her with horror and repulsion. He felt he wanted to get away alone and never to see Madge again, to forget last night and all that had led up to it, to cleanse himself from even the memory of one woman, so that he might hope in some distant future, when he had redeemed himself, to fill his life with the reality of the other.

An interruption to his unprofitable thoughts came in the shape of rain, which necessitated a halt, so that the man could put up the hood and side wings; making an excuse, he got out of the car and began tramping up and down in the wet, windy darkness, sick of inaction and thought, glad of even so brief a solitude.

When he returned, Madge seemed to be half asleep, and he sat back in his corner looking straight out into the darkness, and thinking of Pauline—always of Pauline, though he knew the folly of such thoughts well enough.

Dover at last, and the Lord Warden Hotel. Madge was stiff with long sitting in the cold, and declared herself very hungry; while she booked her rooms, Desmond ordered dinner, then went to have a bath.

It was after eight o'clock when they sat down, and Madge announced that she had spoken to her maid and given orders for her things to be packed and brought down the following day in time for the night-boat. Desmond sat watching her from narrowed eyes.

"I am staying till you go," he said. "We can talk things over to-morrow. I've booked a room here for myself. . . ."

He ate very little, and afterwards went off to the telephone, rang up Eve's house, and waited anxiously; the call came through quickly, thanks to it being Sunday evening, and he heard Peter's voice:

"This is 17952 Mayfair. Who are you?"

In reply to his demand for Eve, Peter replied that she had people dining, could he give her a message, whereupon Desmond cursed softly.

"I wanted to speak to her rather particularly. Be a good fellow and fetch her," he said, and a minute or two after he heard Eve speaking.

"Is that you, Desmond dear?"

"Yes. I'm at Dover, and I am coming to town to-morrow. I must see you alone. Can you give me lunch?"

A moment's silence, then she told him she could, and he hung up the receiver and went back to Madge. She was looking idly through the "*Sunday Times*," and glanced up at him as he approached.

"Do you want to talk?" she said.

"No—at least not yet," was his reply. "I want some exercise. Do you mind if I go off for a walk for an hour or so? I'll be back by ten."

"Walk? Now? In the dark?" she exclaimed. "What an extraordinary person you are, Desmond!"

"Yes. Now. Do you mind?" he repeated patiently. "I've been sitting all day."

"Don't be late then. We have things we must settle," she said, and with this none too gracious permission he left the room and the hotel.

The wind had arisen again with the coming of darkness, and as he emerged into the open a roar of sound burst upon his ears, and the force of the gale nearly knocked him down as it tore howling through the night. He fought the wind step by step till he reached a more sheltered road, and then he strode along it, caring very little for direction, but relieved to be alone in the fresh darkness of the night. The roar of the wind and the sea all

about him helped to steady his nerves, and drove away the physical and mental heaviness that had oppressed him for over twenty-four hours, and enabled him to think coherently and face the situation before him.

The thing that had happened, had happened with such surprising suddenness that till now he hardly realised its full consequences; idle playing with fire had led to so great a conflagration that he had been half stunned. Now he saw plainly what he had done, and since hypocrisy was not one of his vices he faced facts honestly; prominent among those facts was Madge's taunt:

"You are what is known popularly as a gentleman."

That hit him hard. To act as he had done, and then as he proposed to do, was certainly not in accordance with even the barest rules of decency, let alone the traditions in which he had been reared.

Tramping through the windy darkness he came to the only possible conclusion. He must accompany Madge where she wished to go, and for what length of time she desired his presence; and having made up his mind he swung round and tramped back to the hotel, driving back all thoughts of what might have been.

He found Madge where he had left her, and went straight to the matter in hand.

"Madge," he said, as she laid her book aside,

"I've been thinking over what you said—and you are right. It would be putting you in a rotten position if I stay behind. I'll come to Paris for a time, or wherever you decide to go—if you'll allow me——"

She flung the paper aside and searched his face with eyes that let little escape them.

"Very well," she said, after a short pause, "I certainly think it is the best thing to do. I shall stay in Paris for a few days, just to get some clothes, and then we'll get away south. Algiers would be as good as anywhere. Biskra, perhaps. However, we shall have plenty of time to decide."

He bent his head in assent.

"I am going up to town to-morrow morning," he said, "probably before you are up. Can I do anything for you?"

She frowned, thinking hard for a moment, then nodded.

"You can send a note round to Suzanne . . . and I wonder . . . if you could get Pauline to see you for a few minutes?"

He felt himself change colour, and to hide it made a hasty pretense of looking for matches.

"What for?" he said, his back half turned to her.

"To tell her I am—sorry to bring all this worry and unpleasantness into her life directly she is home. To tell her that I don't want her to hate me for it. . . ."

There was a sincerity in her voice that he had



never heard before. Startled, he faced round to see her face suddenly tender and rather pitiful like a child's. At his look she rose, with a sudden little quiver in her face.

"I love Pauline," she said rather low. "She is the one being in the world whose opinion I value. Oh, of course, you wouldn't understand, and after all I know you can't see her. I know that—she wouldn't see you, considering the relation you and I are in to one another. I'm going to bed—I'm tired. Shall I see you?"

He looked at her, his eyes curiously glazed like those of a man half unconscious.

"No," he said rather hoarsely, "you need sleep—so do I. Good night."

Ten minutes later he went up to his room. It was still early, only ten o'clock, but he was exhausted by all that had happened, and he had hardly flung himself into bed before he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER VI

PAULINE came out of the house, pulled her furs more closely round her throat, and walked rapidly through Grosvenor Square; the wind was bitterly cold though the sky was almost cloudless, and she felt it after the more genial climate to which she had been so long accustomed.

It was Monday morning, and she was on her way to luncheon with Eve, but she had an order to give for her mother, so she was going to Bond Street first.

It had been a strange Sunday. No word had come from Madge. Toby had left the house without seeing anyone but Billy, and Billy had gone with him, not to reappear that day. She had gone to eight o'clock service at St. Peter's, and in the evening, because she did not wish to let her thoughts wander to Lord Desmond, had gone to hear Raven preach, and although she was exceedingly unhappy and tormented by her imagination, the sermon had for the time being so held her that everything else was blotted out.

The church was crowded, chiefly with the poorer members of his usual congregation, and with those devout churchgoers who follow a popular preacher; yet there was a sprinkling of the wealthy morning



congregation, among it Eve herself, looking pale and miserable and very worried.

Pauline had seen her and meant to speak to her afterwards, but by the time Raven had descended the pulpit steps and the last hymn was being sung, she had forgotten everything but the words she had heard.

The sermon was one of a course of the Apostles, and that night the text was a part of the chapter of St. Luke's Gospel which relates the giving of the charge to St. Peter, with its reiterated question and command, until his impetuous stormy loving heart shows its grieved reproach in the cry:

"Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee . . ."

Pauline could not have believed Raven capable of either the dramatic force or the emotion that he showed in the twenty minutes that he occupied the pulpit, neither could she have believed herself to be so deeply stirred by a sermon. Yet, in common with many other members of the crowded congregation, she needed to exert definite self-control to appear unmoved. The fisherman who was to move the world had always been to her the most beloved of the early saints; his humanity was so apparent, his faults and weakness so glaring, his warm-hearted enthusiasm so attractive, that he had seemed to her a more vividly alive personality than that of his companions. To her the dreadful-ness of his denial seemed only to show up the more brilliantly the wonder of his later life. Did the

bitter memories of that awful night of his Lord's suffering come back in force at that risen Lord's apparent distrust of his affection? Did the bitter grief at the repeated question arise from his own tragic self-knowledge? Did he dream, perhaps of the countless generations who would read the story of his denial? If so, he must indeed have paid his debt in full. The supreme courage, the devotion, the tenderness of the life that lay ahead was hidden from him, he was not permitted to foresee how he was to expiate his sin, or know that no name on earth should be more venerated than his, no personality more beloved or cherished, the fisherman who denied his Lord and all his life after toiled and wept and suffered to wipe out that denial! Who paid for one moment's cowardice by forty years of selfless devotion, crowned by an heroic death . . . did he look back on that life now and see what it had meant to millions? Did he see the greatest church in the world crowning the city that had been the capital of the world, and know that it was dedicated to him? Did he know now, in the radiance of that life which he had entered in glory, the prayers that should bear his name for blessing?

Pauline wondered and thought, as she had often wondered and thought in that great church in Rome, as she walked home in the windy darkness, conscious as she had seldom been of the strength and reality of the "things of the Spirit"; for Raven



had moved the very depths of her soul, and not hers only; the tense faces of which she had been dimly conscious as he spoke, the utter silence in the church, all told her that what she felt, hundreds had felt with her.

Not till she had gone to her room, about ten, did the human aspect of him strike her; then she began to realise that a man who could so search out the hearts of others must, himself, search out his own, that such giving of power must be followed by deep exhaustion. She wondered if anyone in the household looked after him on such an occasion, and was half-minded to leave her room and see for herself if there was a fire in his study, or anything to eat if he should need it. Yet she did not go; a fear lest she should presume on the glimpse of his real self that he had shown her held her back, and she had gone to bed not knowing whether he had yet come in.

Now, as she turned into Bond Street, a taxi passed her, and glancing at it, half unconsciously, she saw it pull up just ahead, opposite Inman and Beal's, less than half a dozen yards away. Almost before it had stopped a man sprang out, swung round, and banged into her shoulder. He drew back sharply, but his words of quick apology were cut short, and he stopped as if all power to move were suspended, bare-headed, with the wind ruffling his hair, and all the colour draining out of his face—Lord Desmond Harbyn.

Pauline felt her heart give a great leap; then it seemed to stand quite still. Inside her muff her fingers pressed each other desperately, and she felt as though the cold of the air was round her very heart. Neither moved for what seemed to be an eternity, then Pauline turned her eyes away from his, bowed mechanically, and walked straight past him.

She did not know where she was going, she did not see anything around her; pure instinct kept her from walking into anyone or being knocked down by traffic. All she saw was that splendid figure standing still and straight, as though graven in marble, and the face with its beauty haggard and ruined, the eyes glazed, and almost terrible as they rested upon hers.

"Please allow me to pass . . ."

A voice at his elbow recalled Desmond to his surroundings, and the fact that he was standing in the middle of the pavement in everybody's way. He murmured an apology, put on his hat, and walked into the shop, dazed and half-stunned by the encounter, yet from sheer force of habit continuing what he had set out to do.

He gave his order for shirts, chose the patterns, and bought a few other things quite calmly, but he had that curious sensation of a dual personality that comes to many highly-strung temperaments in time of shock. Quite calmly, too, he entered his taxi, but when the man asked for an address,



he awoke to the reality of what had happened. Desperation seized him—Pauline, he must find Pauline; the driver stared at the ashen haggard face before him:

“Ain’t yer well, sir?” he demanded, rather wishing he could end the fare. “Got the ’flu?”

Desmond’s pride came to his rescue at the question; through his teeth he spoke shortly.

“Quite well, thank you. 109, Curzon Street.” Eve might know—at all events if she were in she would help him, she must help him, and flinging himself back in the car he made a fierce effort to keep calm.

The butler at 109 stared for a second before he answered the question as to his mistress, then swallowed and drew back.

“Yes, m’lord. Her ladyship’s in her boudoir, m’lord—she’s got . . .”

But Desmond did not wait to hear the end of the sentence; tossing coat and hat on to a chest he went upstairs almost at a run, and reaching his sister’s boudoir went straight in.

“Eve . . .” he cried, hoarsely. “Where are you? . . . Eve! Eve—for God’s sake—ah!”

Eve was seated on a couch, drawn close to the fire. Even in that second he saw the tears on her cheeks; and by her side was Pauline de Fleurian.

She rose swiftly at the violent interruption, gave one look at her brother, then went as swiftly across to him. Taking his outstretched hand in hers she

spoke quite quietly, almost as though she were speaking to a child.

"I am here, dear—what is it?"

But Desmond was not looking at her any longer, but past her to where Pauline stood, absolutely still, her eyes gazing straight into his, and at the look on her face all fled. Custom, life-long habit, training, everything went. Desperate need swept away all artificialities and left him just a human soul stripped of the veneer of convention. Heeding Eve as little as though she were not there, he went straight across to Pauline.

"It was you," he said, and there was an agony in his voice. "You. I had to find you. Listen to me—listen. Pauline . . . Pauline."

He dropped on his knees and laid his cheek down on her hands, and Eve went out of the room, closing the door very softly behind her.

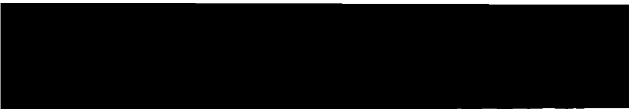
Great emotion wipes out the comprehension of time. When at last he spoke, Pauline did not know if she had stood there a moment or an hour, with his cheek pressed against her, and the desperate clutch of his hands on hers; she was hardly conscious of anything but his nearness. Dazed, with blackness surging about her, and only the certainty of that agonised grip to hold her to physical consciousness, she stood there swaying a little, staring down at his bent head, hearing as from a great distance the deep gasping breaths that were shaking him. And gradually that sound drew



nearer, driving the mists from brain and nerves; the room steadied, the darkness cleared. She felt with her body once again, and could command her mind, and with that returning power of command a great wave of emotion surged through her, sweeping away in the power of its truth all artificial and foolish scruples. She loved him. He was hers . . . what he had done in the past was less than nothing . . . he was hers.

She felt his grip weakening as if the great force of his emotion had spent itself in vain, heard him whispering her name so low it was only a sigh, and with quick intuition her fingers tightened convulsively on his; then she bent down, drew one hand sharply from his, and put it about his head, drawing him close with a gesture almost maternal in its fierceness.

"Desmond," she said, "I'm listening—speak to me."



CHAPTER VII

“**P**AULINE . . . don’t move . . . let me stay here a little.”

She sat in a corner of the couch, and beside her was Desmond, half lying, half sitting, with her arms about him; his cheek was pressed against her neck, his arms were outstretched across her lap, his lips were closed. In the complete abandonment of his strength there was something almost childlike, and Pauline held him to her, now and then just turning her head so that her lips could touch his forehead. But she did not look at him. Over his bowed head she gazed straight before her with eyes black and fixed, seeing ever the face of that other woman, the woman who could claim him, who must claim him. She was not jealous. Jealousy must of necessity mean uncertainty, and she could never be uncertain again. He had shown her his inmost heart, and no other human being could ever again take her place with him; but life cannot be lived upon the mountain top, and already she was descending to the valley. She had passed through much, but never before had she seen the bare depths of a man’s soul swept clear of all the trappings of convention and habit; and she was too big a woman to see it and remain unmoved.



At last, reluctantly, yet impelled by the gradual return of coherent thought, Desmond lifted his head and looked at her.

"Pauline!" he said. "Pauline, speak to me!"

Her sub-conscious mind was conscious still of that black despair that was creeping about her, but his voice for the moment recalled her more conscious self; her eyes left the distance and turned to meet his, and at the look in them she smiled, a slow smile that drove the shadows from eyes and mouth.

"What can I say to you?" she said. "I have said so much, dear. I have told you all my heart."

"I want to be sure," he said, half under his breath. "I am afraid for the first time in my life. I know fear. Pauline, I have been in hell. And I am afraid of that hell."

"That is past," she said.

"I know. But it is present too. Oh, my dear, what can we do? I can't leave you,—and I must—I must."

She closed her eyes to shut out the vision his words called up, but her tone was quite calm.

"Yes, you must. What are your plans? You will tell me, exactly?"

He shuddered, broke away from her arm, and, leaning forward, spoke with clenched hands and head half turned away.

"I am responsible, and I alone, for what Madge has done," he said, speaking in a harsh voice. "As

I told you, I tried to believe yesterday that the fault was hers. I told myself that because I had left her she was to blame for the whole thing, because she followed me. In effect that's true. I had left her; I never intended to see her again except as I might see any other woman, because—because I had met you. But it's equally a lie . . . I had made love to her, allowed her to get herself talked about with me . . . I had sinned a dozen times in thought . . . but I've told you . . . I've told you everything . . . and the blame is mine, no one else's. *Mine.*"

"Yes," she said, "I understand. And . . . if she is divorced——?"

But even her courage was unequal to finishing the sentence, and he turned to look at her.

"I have asked her to marry me the day after the decree is made absolute," he said.

She stretched out her hand and laid it on his. But for the desperate grip of his fingers on hers he betrayed no emotion when she spoke.

"You did the only thing you could do," she said, steadily. "The only thing . . . we will not talk of that now . . . we cannot. The immediate future . . . is . . . must be . . . arranged for."

She paused a minute, swallowed because her throat was so dry that she found it hard to speak, then continued: "Is it necessary that you stay long in Paris? Or wherever it is you have to go?"

Her calmness helped him; intolerable as it was, questions must be asked and answered, and plain speaking would help, not hinder.

"No. I must cross to Paris to-night, and I must stay a few weeks, perhaps."

"You will write to me?"

"Every day . . . I shall . . . I must . . . stay at the same hotel . . . but it's only that . . . only . . ."

His voice failed him, and for a moment he struggled for control; then suddenly he let go her hand, rose, and walked over to the fire.

"Pauline . . . I can't speak calmly when I'm near you," he said, keeping his back to her. "It is horrible to have to say to you in words what I must say. But you understand that I have no choice. I have told you my life. I have hidden nothing from you . . . if you had been a priest hearing my confession before my death I could have told you no more . . . you are good enough to do what I thought only God could do . . . you can forgive me. I have made no excuses . . . all I know is that if I could wipe out all I have done I would count no punishment too heavy. And even now I must cause you more pain . . . you will hear what people will say of me . . . only—Oh Pauline! believe me . . . they can never think so badly of me as I think of myself. But I love you . . . I love you . . . my love for you is the

only good thing in me, and I swear before God that it shall drive all the evil out of my life and my heart . . . and when . . . when I have to keep my promise to Madge I will keep it before the world, but from this moment no woman but you shall ever enter or touch my life again . . . whether I can be with you or not . . . whether I die or live . . . I will meet you again as I am . . . now . . . Pauline . . . you understand? As I am."

He turned to her at the last words, straightening himself to his full height, looking at her with eyes that blazed. His strength and his pride had come back to him, and as Pauline gazed upon him she knew how utterly he would keep his word.

The gong rang for luncheon as they talked, and at the sound Pauline gave a little sign of dismay; and at that moment the door opened and Eve appeared.

She looked from one to the other with grave yet anxious eyes, and at the look on her brother's face turned questioningly to Pauline.

"Pauline . . . I don't understand," she said. "Desmond——"

"Desmond understands," Pauline said, and met his eyes with a look in hers that made Eve's heart ache. "And some day he will tell you, dear. Don't ask us now . . ."

Desmond made a movement towards her, but Eve interrupted.

"I will ask no questions because Pauline is—Pauline," she said. "But you both need food and rest. I will give you five minutes, Desmond. Pauline, will you come to my room?"

Pauline followed her across the hall; and as she stood before the mirror putting a few infinitesimal touches to herself, Eve spoke again:

"Is he—going with Madge?"

"He must . . . don't you see that he must?"

"And you—care still?"

Pauline's eyes suddenly seemed to see herself in the mirror no longer, and the smile that just touched her lips was answer before she spoke.

"Yes," she said, "I care . . . and I understand. Desmond will do what he must do . . . what custom demands, but he will be mine . . . not hers. That is all."

They went downstairs into the grey and white dining-room to find Desmond waiting in the hall, watching for them; and as Pauline met his eyes she saw a great relief come into them, as though the brief separation had made him suffer.

The presence of the servants made personal conversation impossible, and to both of them it was welcome. They had passed through such deep waters that they were incapable of speech with regard to anything that approached themselves, and desired once again the ordinary habits of convention demanded, to enable them to regain their customary poise.

To Pauline it was the strangest hour she had ever spent, and the most incredible. Once or twice, looking at Desmond, she could not believe the truth. He looked perfectly composed, though a trifle pale, and his level brows frowned a little; he had given his hair, which curled when it was rough, a brushing that made it lie sleekly to his head; the lines about the scornful, beautiful lips were deeply marked, and more than ever he reminded her of one of those wonderful statues in the Louvre—the statues of splendid limbs and fine lines, with the head of a Roman patrician on the column of the thick muscular neck with its long slope from the nape to the spine. He talked negligently about various surface topics, ignoring the preplexed questioning in Eve's look; but when the meal was over and they were leaving the dining-room, he touched her arm.

"Eve, may we have your boudoir this afternoon? I have to go by the boat-train."

She stopped and looked at Pauline.

"Do you want to stay with Desmond?" she said, with a slight emphasis on the verb that did not escape Pauline's notice, and Pauline smiled; not as she had smiled with Desmond, but with the spirit of real amusement in her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "till the last moment, Eve."

Eve made a gesture of despair.

"It is wrong!" she exclaimed. "All wrong! He has injured you, Pauline, because he has in-



jured your brother; he admits it. And you admit you love him. Ah, indeed, I don't understand."

Desmond's hand went out and gripped Pauline's; he looked at her, but he spoke to his sister.

"No one except Pauline could understand," he said, speaking in a low, rapid voice. "I don't ask you to, Eve, or expect it. And I cannot explain to you, I cannot talk of it. All I ask is that you give up the only thing that is left—time. There are forces before which everything goes . . . and we have only an hour or two left."

His face had grown white and hard as he spoke, and his fingers tightened on Pauline's arm. Eve flushed, met the steel-blue gaze of his eyes, then drew sharply back.

"You can stay; you shall not be disturbed," she said, and left them.

Alone in Eve's own room they talked of the past and the present, never of the future, until the time for parting drew near, and then at last it was Pauline who spoke of the days to come, which she so dreaded.

"When you leave Paris, or wherever you must go, will you let me see you before you make any further plans?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"And you will take care? You will not worry yourself ill?"

The fear that dogs every woman lest her lover should fall ill untended was in her voice, but from

where he sat in a great chair drawn close he smiled at her.

"I am never ill," he said. "I don't know what it means."

The words had hardly passed his lips before the memory of yesterday morning was with him—the sick exhaustion of mind and body that brought the blood to his face in a dull red. Pauline knew, he had told her; and quick to comfort, she leant forwards towards him and laid her head for an instant against his shoulder.

"You are looking backward," she said. "Do not, my dearest. I will not, and you must not. But if you decide to go abroad, if you take risks, remember that I am living only for news of you. Remember, so long as you are in the world I can bear my life; but if you are not—if you are not—I——"

Her voice broke suddenly; and swinging round, he gathered her into his arms.

"I'm not worth one thought or one tear of yours," he whispered unsteadily. "But I will be—God helping me, I will be! But oh, Pauline, Pauline, how can I leave you? How can I? You tell me I'm not to look back, but how can I help it? If only I had told you that first day . . . for I knew then . . . I knew."

"So did I," she said, so low he could hardly hear it; and at her words he held her still closer, his lips



BEAUTY FOR ASHES

125

almost touching hers, gazing into her face through the tears that suddenly blinded him.

“It’s too late!” he said, always in that thick stumbling whisper. “It’s too late . . . oh God! . . . what shall we do?”

CHAPTER VIII

IT was quite dark and snowing fast when Desmond left for Dover, and the drive to Victoria was accomplished almost in silence. Pauline, with his arms about her, lay crushed against him in a corner of the car, conscious only that in a few minutes she would feel the roughness of his coat and the clasp of his arms no more.

Neither spoke. Pauline had fought for strength all day, but it had gone from her now, and tears were running down her face, though she made no sound, and Desmond did not dare to talk lest his courage should fail him. It wanted but one moment of weakness, and he knew that he should throw the remnant of his honour to the winds, and implore Pauline to leave England with him. A special license, the boat from Folkestone instead of Dover, and a motor to meet them on the other side. It was so fatally easy, and there was only a minute more. He bent his head and kissed her mouth, tasting the salt wetness of her tears on his lips—there was a swing, a sudden sharp purr of the brakes, lights flashed into the dimness of the car—Victoria Station.

A porter came forward and swung open the door, hesitated, then pushed it to with a queer feeling catching at his sentimental heart. He had wit-



nessed tragic farewells in plenty these last years, but never had he seen a woman's face more stricken than the face of the woman of whom he had just caught sight, ivory white between the black velvet of the hat and the dark furs fallen back from the throat. The chauffeur turned his head, wondering, no doubt, why the luggage was not being taken down, and Desmond pushed the door wide and stepped out of the car. He spoke to the porter, turned and looked for one moment at Pauline, then pulled his tweed cap low over his eyes and went into the booking hall without one backward glance.

The station was busy, there were crowds everywhere, he could hardly expect not to be recognised by someone, and no sooner was he on the platform than a man he knew well stopped him.

"Hullo, Desmond! Where are you off to? Canning, a friend of mine, Lord Desmond Harbyn—Sir John Canning." The elder man bowed, and Desmond put out his hand in mechanical acknowledgment of the introduction; meeting the gaze of very keen, very kindly, blue eyes, and half subconsciously, the thought passed through his brain that here, in the famous physician, was a man of rare understanding and sympathy. George Dane was not particularly observant, but even he could see that there was something wrong, for Desmond's face was ghastly, and his eyes made the easy-going soldier shiver. He was not blessed—or cursed—

with much imagination, but when Desmond had made some brief excuse and walked on, he stared after him, speaking in slow perplexity:

"What's the matter with him? He looks like hell!"

The elder man, tall, rather heavy of build, with a fine face and nearly white hair showing beneath his cap, nodded, and his gaze followed Dane's.

"I have seen Lord Desmond often before," he said, "but never to look like that."

He said no more, but he thought much, for he was a doctor of great repute, and he had listened to many troubles of mind as well as body from his patients, and the sight of a fellow-creature in trouble moved him deeply.

Now that he was no longer with Pauline, Desmond's one wish was to be alone, but on the boat-train it was an impossibility, and at Dover Harbour Madge would be waiting. Madge!—and he had left Pauline—he had left her—he might never see her again, Pauline, Pauline. He pulled his cap still lower, biting his lips, clenching and unclenching his hands beneath the rug as the train tore onwards through the night; he dare not think of the past, he could not think of the future; he felt like a man feels who holds his breath between two pangs of mortal agony, afraid to move lest he should be overwhelmed by pain too great for him to bear.

Dover at last, and as he descended from the



train a roar of wind and whirling snow met him, and the sound of the slap and crash of the water against the piers came to his ears. It was a bad night, with a wicked sea running outside in the blackness of the Channel, and the passengers going on board looked askance at the prospect the next hour held. Carter at his elbow spoke hurriedly.

"Mrs. Cardew has gone on board, m'lord, her maid has just told me."

Desmond nodded. The whipping spray, the bitter cold air and the noise of sea and wind and roaring steam, helped him to pull himself together. He went on board outwardly able to face the world, and was told by Suzette that Madge was in her cabin.

"Madame asked that you should go and speak to her, m'lord," Suzette added, not without a romantic envy in her eyes. This tall Englishman, with his way of walking as if the earth belonged to him, with his superb looks, his haughty indifference to the things around him, even his very perfect clothes, appealed irresistibly to the Frenchwoman. As he disappeared down the gangway she clasped her hands and gazed at Carter.

"Oh, but 'ee 'is wonderful, milor Desmon'! His 'air curling at the back undaire 'is cap, and 'is fine shoulders and 'is beautiful mouth—oh, 'ee destract me! 'E 'ave my 'art!"

In fiery indignation Carter turned on her.

"'Is 'air don't curl round his cap!" he exclaimed.

"'Ear you talk anyone think he was a bloomin' 'Ebrew! 'Is 'air's properly cut, I can tell you! 'Ee ain't no poet to wear it on his collar!" But Suzette would not yield.

"Eet is very short, but even so it curl—a leetle at the back—all crisp like when eet is rough or wet. I saw 'im come from 'is bath Sunday, in the corridor. It curl, I tell you, then!"

Whereupon Carter was forced to retire, leaving Suzette on the field of victory.

Meanwhile, Madge, who was a bad sailor and hated the sea, had taken off her fur coat and was already lying down, with a novel of Bourget's for company, when Desmond knocked at her cabin door.

"Come in!" she called; and as he entered, sat up in her berth. "Good heavens, Desmond, what's the matter? You look like a ghost!"

"I am all right," he said. "Is there anything I can get for you? We shall be off in a minute or two."

She dropped back on her pillows again at his question.

"No. How I hate the sea! And we're going to have a bad crossing—it's blowing so."

"Only fifty minutes. It will soon be over. I'll come down again presently to see if I can do anything for you."

She laughed.

"Nothing but hold my head!" she rejoined. "I



shall be dreadfully sick I know, so you'd better not come. Nobody's a pretty sight with their head over a basin—keep away till I send Suzette for you."

"Very well, I hope it won't be too bad."

He met the mischievous challenge of her eyes without even seeming to see it, closed the door, and made his way up on deck just as the syren blew its final warning, and a throbbing under foot proclaimed the boat had cast off.

There was hardly anyone on deck, and as the packet lifted to the first swell outside the harbour, Desmond found a place that was fairly sheltered from wind and snow, where at last he was alone.

The lights of Dover were rapidly receding, blurred by the snow, and Desmond, numbed by all he had been through began to walk up and down, his hands deep in the pockets of his long travelling coat, his head bent against the wind.

In the train he had had to fight desperately to keep his self-control. Again and again the tears had dazzled his eyes, and only sheer force of will had driven them back; now he was alone the weakness had passed, and he felt nothing but a dull pain that left him unmoved. Up and down, staggering to the roll and pitch of the deck, glad of the exercise and the stinging cold, he paced, thinking out his plans for the future, trying to decide where he should go when Madge should permit him to leave her. That the novelty of his presence would

very soon wear off he knew; Madge was not in the least in love with him, that he knew also. He had a physical attraction for her, but now there was no longer curiosity to stimulate it, even that would soon die. He had known her too long and too well not to know that she was incapable of a deep love, and as she knew she must marry him before long she would be quite willing for him to go free now. Egypt, Africa, India, the United States—each and all lay open, but he felt incapable of making any decision.

A great snowflake trickled down inside his collar and taking his handkerchief to wipe it away, his fingers came in contact with a little folded paper in his breast pocket. He did not remember having put it there, and making his way to where an electric light burned dully, he opened it and held it to the light. It was a sheet of thick cream paper, and his hands began to tremble as he unfolded it, for the writing was Pauline's:—

"My beloved,

"I don't know where you will be when you find this, but I know you will want me, and this is to tell you once again that I love you with all my soul and body. There never can, never will be another man in my life, and I trust you and believe in you and your future to the uttermost.

"Good-bye, dearest, and God keep you.

"PAULINE."

Sir John Canning, tired of reading the evening papers in the saloon, and untroubled by the weather, put on his big coat, turned up the collar, and went out on to the deck. After the lighted saloon the night seemed pitch black, but the faint electric lamps along the boat showed him the seething white rush of the waves and the wet line of the deck. Swinging to the boat's motion like an old traveller he walked aft, his footsteps inaudible in the noise of the wind and sea, rejoicing in the fact that he had the deck to himself, reached the stern, and swinging round had to catch at a rail to steady himself as a big swell lifted the boat.

When it was past he made his way towards the more sheltered side and stood holding by a stanchion and gazing out to sea. The wind was falling, and the snow had almost ceased; here and there above the reeling masts a star or two gleamed in the darkness, and away ahead on the starboard the great revolving Calais light was visible.

Better weather was coming, and he was just about to go back to the saloon when a sound, very different from those about him, caught his ear. Turning sharply, he scanned the gloom behind him, thought there was no one there, and then saw a man's figure on the corner of a seat hidden from any casual eye. The heavy tweed travelling coat, the long limbs it only partially hid, struck a chord of familiarity in the doctor's brain, and he went a step forward. The man was half-lying, half-sit-

ting, his face hidden by his arms, his hands clenched on his head; there was an air of utter abandonment about his whole attitude, and Sir John would have thought him to be merely exceedingly seasick, but for those clenched and straining hands. He hesitated, then memory aided him, and he went nearer and bent over him.

"Lord Desmond."

A shudder ran through the rigid figure; Sir John saw that a note was twisted between the fingers. He spoke again.

"I am a doctor and, when our mutual friend Dane introduced us at Victoria, I saw you were in some great trouble. I have suffered much myself. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

His voice was deep, tender, and very quiet; his face gravely compassionate; he laid one hand over those clenched fingers, and at the touch Desmond's dry sobbing broke into tears. The struggle of these last hours once over, his agony of grief and bitter remorse would have its way. Sir John stood close by to screen him if any other passenger should come in this direction, his hand on Desmond's, his eyes beneath their frowning brows, very pitiful. He knew him by name and sight quite well, and was familiar with his reputation and many friends, and he had always thought him rather heartless, but now he knew he had been mistaken, for no man could suffer as this man was suffering if he were a shallow or cold nature . . .



only supreme anguish could lead him to this utter depth. The great doctor knew human nature, and he knew that the thing which had caused this breakdown was no ordinary pain, but an agony of the very soul.

A long wail from the syren, and the sound of the ship's bells, proclaimed their nearness to Calais; bending down he spoke in a firm, yet gentle voice:

"Lord Desmond, we shall be in in a few minutes . . . you must pull yourself together . . . drink this . . . it will help you." He took a flask from his pocket as he spoke and poured out some brandy, and held it to Desmond, who swallowed it chokingly, then sat up feeling for his handkerchief, and turning his face away spoke hoarsely.

"Thank you . . . you must think me a damned fool . . . but . . ."

"I never think a man is a 'damned fool' because he has the capacity for suffering," the other said very quietly. "Don't try to explain. I'm not expecting any explanation. We have all gone down to the depths some time or other; we all must if we're going to be worth while. If ever I can be of service, call upon me. That's my address in London, and I shall be back again in a fortnight, when I return from the Riviera. If you are in town, look me up."

As the boat steamed into the smoother water near the harbour, people began to come on deck,

endeavouring to look as though they had been there all the time, and Desmond, putting the card in his pocket, rose to his feet; he did not speak, but he held out his hand, and gave the elder man's a close hard grip. Then he pulled his cap as low as he could, to hide his eyes, turned up his coat collar, and made his way to find Carter.

Suzette, looking very dishevelled and green, was toiling up the companion-way; and in answer to his enquiry, stated that her mistress had sent her to find him, whereupon he went down the stairs and made his way to Madge's cabin. She was powdering her nose before a small glass, and at his entrance glanced at him carelessly.

"Oh, what a crossing! But I have not been ill; I think I was too interested in the book. Imagine what a triumph it is for me, and I am so hungry! I had no dinner at Dover, because I thought it such a waste, in the circumstances, to pay for it. We can have—why, Desmond, what's the matter? You've not been sick, surely?"

"No, of course not," he said impatiently, cursing the light shining full in his face. "I'm perfectly all right. You're imagining things. You did yesterday."

But Madge was far too shrewd to be put off in such a manner; instead, she came close to him and looked in his face. A curious expression crossed her face, and she drew back.



"You have been crying," she said, quite quietly. "Why?"

Furious that she should guess his weakness he shrugged his shoulders and turned to the door.

"My dear Madge, what utter nonsense!" he said, his voice harsh and angry. "What in the name of heaven put such a ridiculous idea into your head. Do you think I go in for hysteria?"

She handed her small mirror to him.

"Look at your eyes," she said, still in that quiet voice. "Anyone not blind would know. Put your cap on before you leave the cabin, the peak hides them. And if you will go I will follow you."

Without a word, he turned round and left the cabin; and when the door had closed after him, Madge's calmness suddenly departed. Stamping on the floor, she pulled the furs away from her throat and spoke aloud, her voice shaking and passionate:

"There's someone else—someone else!" she stormed. "I knew it yesterday—oh, I can't bear it, I won't! He's mine now, mine."

She set her teeth on her wrist and bit it savagely, then, as the pain warned her, gave a little sob of sheer rage; the next moment, distant shouts and bangs and the cessation of all movement, told her the boat was alongside the quay. Swallowing anger and jealousy together, she picked up her gloves and muff, and went out of the cabin.

CHAPTER IX

“YOU said St. Peter’s Rectory, didn’t you, madame?”

The words roused Pauline from the trance of misery which had held her on the drive from Victoria; and, with a start, she realised that she was before her own door, with Eve’s chauffeur rather anxiously looking in upon her.

The instinct to hide her feelings from all the world was second nature to Pauline, and habit stands by a man or woman even in the greatest crisis, so she drew her fur cloak loosely round her shoulders, picked up the crushed white gloves that lay on the floor, and descended on to the wet cold of the pavement, although no one had as yet answered the bell the chauffeur had rung.

She was sufficiently mistress of her nerves to be able to control the outward signs of emotion if she were let alone, but she did not realise how desperately ill she looked; so that, meeting Billy in the hall, she was surprised at his exclamation:

“Good heavens, Pauline! What’s happened?”

Slowly her eyes focussed on her brother from some remote distance; in a curious detached way, with which most people are familiar, she observed that he was in a dinner jacket, which must mean



she was late. Not that it mattered, nothing mattered just now but her necessity for solitude. So she gave him no word in answer, but after that one look passed him and went slowly up the stairs, leaving Billy to stare after her in amazement.

Dicky, coming across the hall, found him still staring, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"What've you lost, old sport?" he demanded, and was properly surprised when Billy shook him off.

"Shut up. Pauline has just come in. She looks ill."

"Ill? Oh, bad luck. Can I do anything?"

Billy signed an impatient negative.

"No. Do you know when mother will be in?"

"Not till late. She's dining with Mrs. Maitland."

"Of course. Well, never mind."

He felt half inclined to follow Pauline upstairs, and see if he could be of any service, but some instinct forbade him, and instead he went out to the waiting taxi and departed with his brother to the theatre.

Meanwhile, Pauline, once in her own room, began mechanically to take off her hat, and paused, with the pins still half withdrawn, as a knock came at the door. It was utterly impossible and foolish, yet she had the most absurd feeling that if she opened the door she should see Desmond. The feeling was so strong that when the knock was re-

peated she laid down her hat, and going slowly across the room, opened the door without answering. The sight of Estelle's severe countenance brought her back to reality with a shock, and she drew back, covering her mouth with her interlaced fingers to check the cry of desolation that rose to her lips. Estelle, severely practical, looked at the clock and then at her mistress.

"I did not know, madame, that you intended to dine out," she said. "It is a quarter to nine."

Pauline glanced at her watch.

"Is it?" she said, dully. "Just put out my things and then you need not stay, Estelle. I'm not coming down again to-night."

"You are not well, madame? Let me get you something——"

Pauline made a gesture that silenced her.

"I am quite well," she said, "but I want to be alone."

The elder woman's keen eyes travelled over her ashen face and dishevelled hair.

"But, madame, you look ill; there is something wrong."

For a moment Pauline's eyes met hers.

"Yes. There is something wrong," she said, "but not with my body, Estelle. Put my things ready. That is all."

Estelle proceeded to obey, lit the gas fire, fetched hot water, then shot one final bolt:



"Have you dined, madame?"

Pauline signed a negative, and Estelle, as if satisfied, closed the door. She had found out what she wanted to know, and her mind was made up; yet, when she entered Pauline's sitting-room, to put away the things, she stood quite still for a minute, her hard, plain face alight with some strong emotion.

"It is some man," she said, speaking half aloud, her French accent suddenly apparent. "No one but a man could bring that look to her face . . . men . . . they make all the trouble in the world . . . and they will never let her alone. Holy Virgin, keep her! . . . she has suffered enough."

As for Pauline, she felt stunned; the emotion which had racked her during that last hour of Desmond's presence seemed to have passed utterly away. She was quite calm, but she also felt quite numb. She was no longer conscious of suffering, as she had been during the drive back from Victoria. She was not even conscious of the physical exhaustion that Billy had seen in her face. Her preparations for bed were mechanical, her manner quite composed; and when at last she lay in the darkness, her only feeling was one of relief that she had succeeded in evading the members of her family.

She slept heavily and almost dreamlessly; but in the early hours of the morning, just as the wet,

grey dawn was breaking over London, she awoke, and lay for a moment gazing about the room, wondering what was the meaning of the suspense that held her spirit in abeyance.

The house was very still, and, lifting her wrist, she looked at her watch. A quarter to seven . . . it was no good getting up just yet.

Outside, a milk cart rattled down the street, and a moment later a gust of wind drove a tattoo of rain against the window panes; it was a wild morning, it must have been a wild night. Pauline's limbs stiffened, and she lay tense and rigid. A wild night . . . the Channel boat . . . Desmond . . . was he safe, was France reached safely? It was the first time since their parting that she had allowed her thoughts definitely to rest upon him, and with the actual framing of the name upon her lips came the shattering realisation of what had happened. He had left her, left her to go with another woman who had the prior claim, left her to be in that woman's company for an indefinite period, the woman he must very shortly marry. He was in that woman's company now.

The thing hit her like a physical blow. Her imagination, always vivid, tormented her in spite of herself. For the future, she had little fear, because not only did she refuse even to contemplate it, but because she believed utterly in the man she loved; but the past, even her love could never undo. It had been. He might belong to her, but



he had once belonged to Madge. Madge had known an intimacy that she, Pauline, could never know.

Pauline, despite her unhappy marriage and the circumstances of that married life, had retained a singular purity of soul; she possessed a wide and rather tragic knowledge of her fellow creatures, and much evil had been forced upon her notice, but it had in no way corrupted her real self. She had learned to discover how often good lives on in the hearts of even the most depraved of men and women; she had seen the most exquisite flowers of self-sacrifice and love bloom in the most evil soil, had learned not to judge her fellows harshly, until the full circumstances of their lives were known to her. The atmosphere of profligacy and general dissipation with which her husband had surrounded her and himself had not soiled the cleanliness of her own soul, but it had taught her the frailty of human nature and its helplessness before the elemental forces of life. It had taught her to turn back with the belief of a child to the God of her father, and to rely upon a Power other than herself.

But, withal, she was very human, and her temperament was ardent; her affections were not easily stirred, but once aroused, they were tenacious; her love, once given, never faltered, and Desmond Harbyn had moved her to the very depths of her being. She had given the whole of her heart, and

such giving, even if it be joy, must also be exquisite suffering. She would have been more than human if the thought of the recent intimacy between her lover and another woman had not been a torment. Distant sounds in the house proclaimed that the maids were astir, soon she would have to rise and face the world without betraying herself; and, although outward emotion still lay passive, her nerves shrank from the ordeal. She was no longer as she had been last night, this morning pain held her for its own, but she was composed, nevertheless. She suffered, but she had no desire to express that suffering by words or tears.

Estelle's entrance roused her from the dreary contemplation of past and present; she saw the woman give her a quick, anxious glance as she entered, and the expression of surprise, mingled with relief, that crossed her face at the calmness of her mistress' manner.

Pauline drank her tea slowly, watching her with absent eyes as she moved about the room, and wondering where Desmond was, what he was doing.

She would have been relieved had she been able to breakfast in her own room, but such a proceeding would, she knew, have had the effect of bringing her mother upstairs, full of gentle enquiries and kindly fussings. So, as a lesser evil, she went down to the dining-room, where she found Henrietta and Billy. Henrietta had a letter in her hand,



and, as Pauline bade her good morning, passed it across.

"Look at that, Pauline! He's in a great hurry to wash dirty linen in public."

Pauline took the letter and read it through; it was from Toby, brief and quite clear in its purport, stating that he was writing to her because he did not wish to upset his mother too much, that he had seen his lawyer the previous day and put the matter of the divorce in his hands.

"Please tell the others and make them clearly understand that there's to be no nonsense about the matter," he wrote. "My mind is quite made up, and silence on the family's part will save both them and me trouble."

"She won't attempt to defend, I imagine," Billy remarked. "Considering that she joined Desmond quite openly at his hotel, she wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Well, it's a thousand pities, but I don't see what else he could do. Poor little mother, I'm afraid she'll take it badly."

"Pauline and I will feel it more than she will because we'll suffer by it more," Henrietta exclaimed rather hotly. "A nice thing as partner through the first *real* peace season, isn't it? Divorce case—even the same name! It's horrible for us. Horrible! Isn't it, Pauline?"

"It's certainly unpleasant," Pauline said, "but it is no good anticipating trouble. If it is an undefended suit it will go through almost unnoticed."

"You forget Toby may claim damages," Billy said, looking across at her, "and I don't think the press will leave it quite alone. Desmond's always been rather a noticeable figure in London, and the wretched business coming on in the height of the season will be too tempting for the papers—most of them—to resist. Hullo, Raven! Morning. We were discussing Toby's news. I suppose he's written to you."

Pauline looked across at Raven; she found herself wondering what he would say, and after returning his brief greeting listened with an intentness that was out of all proportions to the matter. Raven's answer, however, was non-committal.

"He telephoned last night."

"I'll go round and see him to-day," Billy said, helping himself to ham and eggs. "Poor devil, it is a smash up. Oh lord, how I wish it was anybody else than Desmond!"

"Desmond always was in trouble with women," Henrietta said, with the modern frankness of her age and sex. "I've heard Eve say so. It's his looks, I suppose, and his figure."

"Can't see what all of you admire so much in the fellow," Dicky exclaimed in a somewhat truculent voice. "Too much like the bust of some of the Roman emperors to please me—that muscular neck of his and those great shoulders, and that snaky line to the back of his head and neck. He's too unusual anyway. There's something queer



about the fella. Sort of blighter that if he'd been a patrician of ancient Rome—just what he looks like by the way—he would have fought in the arena as an amateur, in order to provide himself with a new sensation. He's not exactly normal. There's something odd, any way."

"How long's it taken you to work all that out?" Billy enquired.

"Oh—year or so," was the airy reply. "You can see it for yourself if you care to look. Pauline's a stranger to him. She'll probably see better what I mean. Do you, Pauline?" He leant forward, tapping the table with restless fingers, his eager eyes on hers.

"Do you?" he repeated.

Raven saved her the necessity of an answer by the curt:

"I am sure Pauline has far many other things to interest her," and she snatched at the brief respite.

"We haven't all your passion for analysis, Dicky," she said, with a light laugh. "Let's discuss something or someone else."

Life had taught her too stern a lesson for a chance remark to upset her composure, but all the same she was conscious of the strain silence cost her. The desire to champion her lover was fierce, and she knew well enough that such occasions would be frequent and often even more trying, and for his sake she must keep her self-control.

As she rose from the breakfast table a sudden dread seized her, a dread of the next few hours till she should receive the letter Desmond was sending from Paris, a fear lest she should find the part she had chosen too hard, and follow him as she could and longed to, to France. It would be so easy—a sure enough guide to the fact that it would be wrong. But if she was to keep her resolution she must find some definite occupation, and Raven would be the person to give it to her; on enquiry she was told that he had not yet gone out, so she made her way to his part of the house, and knocked at the study door.

In answer to his call she entered, and found him opening a pile of letters, and the cheerlessness of the room, with its small fire, its absence of any charming or luxurious thing, reacted on her painfully. He looked surprised to see her, and she felt she must justify her action in coming.

"I want to talk to you sometime," she said, "to-day if possible, and I have come to ask you when my best chances might be."

He ceased his rapid tearing open of envelopes and touched a chair.

"Won't you sit down?" he said. "To talk to me? You?"

There was an indescribable tone in the words, and Pauline felt the slow colour rise to her face.

"Do you think it so strange that I do occasionally consider the serious things of life?" she said, a

faint irony in her voice. "I must appear singularly worldly to you."

He looked at her with his inscrutable eyes, then away at the papers beneath his hand.

"No. Not that," he said slowly, "only—different. What can we have in common?"

"Must a woman dress dowdily and make herself wholly unattractive for you to credit her with a soul?" she asked, the irony more marked in tone and face. "My dear Raven, from what I saw on Sunday, your congregation is largely composed of a very different type. Perhaps that is why you are not giving me a very warm welcome."

His eyes narrowed in that curious way that accentuated the look of repression and force in his face.

"I find it difficult to trouble myself about most of them," he said shortly.

Pauline's lip curled. She was not receiving the treatment she expected, and the very fact of her own overwhelming grief and desolation made her not more patient with her fellows, but more ready to defy them. Raven's attitude annoyed her and she promptly retaliated.

"I am aware of the opinion priests have of women," she said. "But it is unusual and, therefore, interesting to hear a priest admit it. I came to you chiefly as my brother, but I am obliged to you for pointing out to me that you are a priest first. Forgive me for my intrusion."

He made a gesture to stop her as she rose, but she ignored it and walked straight out of the room and he drew back against the table and looked after her, his set face a little paler than usual, a little pulse in his cheek beating furiously.

He wanted, desperately, to call her back, longed with all his heart to go after her and beg her not to misunderstand—and realised at the same time how utterly impossible it would be to explain the reason of his behaviour. He could not tell her how completely her arrival had disorganised the routine of his life, how the mere knowledge that she was in the house disturbed and distracted him, how her personality intruded upon his mind and thoughts when he most wished to concentrate upon his work. He could not explain the curious psychological effect that she had upon him, or make her realise how he craved for her affection and companionship.

To himself he felt that as if in some way her mere presence had opened a door to him, letting him see the world as she saw it, with its human love, its joy, its colour and vivid eager movement. The hard and stern rules which he had made for himself, the lonely path he had chosen, seemed all at once to be shown to him as they really were, laws for following God, with all the Divine tenderness and beauty harshly struck out. Why had he been content thus to hamper his life and cripple all the legitimate longings of his heart? Yet such reas-



oning was specious, and he dared not trust it or himself. His severity of outlook appeared no longer spiritual, but narrow, his refusal to admit beauty into his personal surroundings, merely foolish, his unrelenting harshness to himself a negation of God's purposes.

He had thought that first evening to put the whole matter aside, to ignore the turmoil thus roused, but he found it an impossibility. Opportunity or temptation—which it was he could not tell, and such a state of things made him wretched. Pauline's whole personality even to its smallest details disturbed the current of his life and thoughts most profoundly. The smooth waves of her lovely dark hair, the creamy pallor of her skin, her great dusky eyes, and the slender exquisite lines of her figure—all fascinated him. He found himself eager to see her, eager to observe how the clothes she wore set off her particular charm; the clinging materials she wore, the soft dark loveliness of her furs, the vivid richness of the brocades she affected when not in black, the very way those clothes were cut—he thought of it all, noticed every detail, appreciated every tiny atom of artistry and of difference. He knew she generally wore a great square emerald on the middle finger of her right hand, knew that she never appeared without a long brooch of ten wonderful diamonds set in a single bar of platinum, was acutely aware of the faint fragrance of her—though he was not well enough

versed in scents to know what it was she used. Like the man who waits for the renewed attack of pain that he knows is only suspended, not cured, so Raven knew, far down in his heart, the real truth of Pauline's strange influence—but like the man who is almost afraid to breathe lest the pain should start again, so he refused to even turn his thoughts in the direction of that truth. Memory was the thing he dreaded more than anything else, and it was memory that Pauline's personality touched.

So he did not go after her, but turned back to his letters and went on reading them till he realised that he had not comprehended a single sentence since she had left the study. That startled him to stern measures and he sat down determined to concentrate.

It was useless. Fifteen minutes later he got up again, changed his cassock for a coat, and let himself out into the wet, windy morning. He went straight to the Park and tramped across to Kensington Gardens. This disturbing of his habits was unheard of, and he resented it bitterly because it proved to him that he was not nearly so strong as he had believed. He tried to tell himself that when the novelty of Pauline's presence wore away, the restlessness it caused would pass away also, but deep down in his heart he knew that was not true. She was unconsciously giving him a glimpse



of the life upon which he had turned his back thirteen years before and all that renunciation meant.

Remembering a book he wanted he walked on to Notting Hill to a second-hand bookshop he knew of there, found and bought the book, and returned by way of the Bayswater Road, and as he turned into the park he met Lady Clere, muffled in furs, and walking with her daughter Eve beside her.

Lady Clere, in her limp way, was one of his most ardent supporters, but now, at sight of him, she was evidently distressed, and would have preferred not to stop, but Eve gently detained her.

"Good morning. We were going, presently, to the Rectory to find out where we could see you, were we not, mother?"

Lady Clere put up her hand to her mouth with a pathetic attempt to hide its trembling.

"Yes, dear. Yes, Mr. Cardew. This dreadful affair—I must have your advice . . ."

She was on the verge of tears, and Raven, knowing her weakness, spoke hastily.

"My dear Lady Clere, if there is anything I can do for you of course I will try to do it; perhaps you would like me to call one day soon."

"Oh yes. Do. I should!" she answered, with vague relief, "because we must decide what our attitude is to be." Raven bowed.

"If I can be of any use," he said, "perhaps, Lady Eve, you would fix up the appointment for your mother."

"Certainly," Eve said. "If you have time do come round this afternoon. Mother will have had a rest and you can talk to her . . ."

So it was agreed, and Raven went on towards the clergy-house, where he had a curate to see, and a vestry meeting. Luncheon in Lent consisted, for him, of bread and cheese, and as such was soon over, but it was later than he thought when he set out for Berkeley Square, and he arrived on the doorstep at the same moment as Lady Henry Harbryn, who bowed heavily.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Cardew. Have you come to comfort my poor sister-in-law in this dreadful affliction?"

Raven stood aside for her to pass in, and his face gave no hint of his sudden desire to laugh.

"Lady Clere wishes to see me, I think," he said, "but I am a good deal later than I intended to be, and she may now be engaged."

Apparently she was not, for they were ushered into the drawing-room and found Lady Clere alone except for Eve, who was certainly proving herself a devoted daughter at this juncture.

Lady Henry sailed forward, embraced sister-in-law and niece, and sat down in a high, straight chair.

"My dear Elizabeth, I cannot tell you how pro-

foundly shocked I am, and how extremely I feel for your distress," she began. "I had Easton's note this morning, and I should have come to you at once, but Henry has a touch of liver—a slight chill I believe it to be—and he did not wish to be left. But this is distressing, most distressing."

Lady Clere blew her nose.

"How kind of you, Clarissa," she said, tearfully. "I am so upset I do not know what to do. Every one must know by now. I am ashamed to go out. Mr. Cardew, what is going to happen, and when?"

Her meaning was plain, but Raven could give her little comfort.

"I do not know," he said. "I have not seen my brother since Saturday night."

"But he means to take action."

"I think so."

Before she could make any answer, Lady Henry put in her oar.

"I do not approve of divorce," she said. "Your brother and Madge are man and wife, and it is their duty to make the best of their position. Surely you, as a High Churchman, do not approve, Mr. Cardew?"

The accent she gave to the designation was indescribable, but Raven was far too indifferent to take umbrage. Lady Henry liked the kind of church which the Reverend Mr. Welby would have called "extremely Protestant," with something little better than a sneer; a church where Morning

Prayer, sermon, and usually the Litany, formed the staple diet of Sundays, where the clergy had no objection to numerous communicants at mid-day on the third Sunday in the month, and where *Hymns Ancient and Modern* were almost an Article of Faith. In her way, she was as narrow and as strict as Martin Welby himself, being quite as convinced of his ultimate end in a tangible Hell as he was of her lengthy languishing in Purgatory.

Long ago, Raven had beaten down his sense of humour, had forced it, with other loveable human qualities, into a subjection that was near destruction, although he had never quite lost it and gained some joy from the frequent battles between these two, for Martin Welby was, oddly enough, a great favourite with Lady Clere, and they frequently met over various charities that the latter aided. Lady Henry's heart was golden when her sympathies were enlisted by the really destitute, or the still more tragic fate of poor gentle-people; and Martin Welby was aware of that trait, and made use of it unscrupulously. Eve knew very little of Raven outside his church, and was rather impatient of him; more than once she had questioned whether he had any heart at all, and quite openly admitted that he was altogether too much of a monk not to annoy her. To-day, however, something about him seemed different, his eyes were no longer cold and inscrutable, but held now a most

curious kind of fierceness—a look she had never seen before. There was a sense of suppressed violence in his manner, as though the real man was striving to break through the stern barriers the priest had erected.

She watched him rather curiously as Lady Henry repeated her question:

“Surely you, as a High Churchman, do not approve of divorce?”

He met that irate lady’s eyes with the curious narrowed inscrutability that baffled the inquisitive.

“I believe it to be a necessity in certain cases,” he said, evading the personal equation.

“I do not see how you can reconcile such a belief with your conscience,” she retorted. “‘Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’ I was not aware that individual cases altered the laws of God.”

“Neither do they. But how many does God join together, Lady Henry? I do not think you can hold Him responsible for many marriages of modern times.”

“That is just the casuistical answer I should have expected!” she remarked, in a tone not untinged with triumph. “The kind of answer the Jesuits whom you admire are taught to make.”

A hint of a smile flickered in Raven’s eyes for a second, but he answered quite seriously:

“My dear Lady Henry, you pay me a compli-

ment. The Jesuits are very highly trained men."

"Trained? Yes, I daresay they are trained! Trained to make people believe black's white. I'm surprised at you, I hear you even have incense at Holy Communion?"

Raven's nostrils dilated, his mouth nearly quivered into a smile, and Eve saw the symptoms with relief at such a human sign, and hastened to intervene:

"Don't you think, Aunt Clarissa," she said, "that mother had better go south for a few weeks till the first shock of things has passed away? People will soon finish their gossip. Mr. Cardew, don't you agree?"

Luckily, Lady Henry approved of the plan, and followed the herring trail with avidity, and Lady Clere began to listen, so that Eve was able to draw her chair a little aside and speak quietly to Raven.

"Have you any idea if Toby is going to take action immediately?" she said. "You know, of course, that Madge left England with Desmond by last night's boat?"

"No," he said, frowning at the news, "I did not know that. Toby telephoned me yesterday, about six, saying that Madge had left London and sent him word that she was going to Paris. I had no idea she and Lord Desmond were actually together."

"Yes. I don't want to discuss it now. I can't. Desmond has always meant so much to me that I

cannot even now believe him to be the—the scoundrel people will think him.”

She bit her lip, which threatened for a moment to become unsteady, then went on:

“He has never been that sort of man. People have talked, of course; he is so good to look at, and he has always been attractive to women. But he has never been that contemptible thing—the seeker of other men’s wives. And I feel, I am sure, there is some mistake about all this. He and Madge do not love one another. They have flirted and danced and generally played with fire, but they never intended this, I know it. I am not telling you this because I want to excuse Desmond. I am aware there is no excuse. But just to let you know that there is something beneath the surface. What does Pauline think?”

Her abrupt question was intentional, and Raven’s slightly surprised look told her what she wanted to know before he spoke.

“Pauline?” he echoed. “She has hardly mentioned the matter. It is doubly distasteful to her by reason of her own unhappy marriage and her affection for Madge.”

Eve nodded, but she did not speak. Raven knew nothing of the strange happenings that were so disturbing her, and that was all she had desired to find out.

When Raven rose to take his leave she rose too, bade her mother and aunt farewell, and accom-

panied him down the stairs. In the hall they met Easton, a telegram in his hand, which, after greeting Raven, he gave to his sister.

"From my father," he said, speaking to Raven. "His ship berthed at Liverpool at one o'clock. He will be here to-morrow."



CHAPTER X

ST. MICHAEL and All Angels' was full to the doors for the Friday evening service at eight-thirty, and Pauline settled herself comfortably in a somewhat dark corner, wondering a little how the sermon would affect her—the first she had heard her brother preach. Mrs. Cardew, Henrietta, and, strongly against his will, Dicky, were her companions; Henrietta in an unguarded moment having promised to accompany her mother, had insisted on Dicky sharing what she considered her victimization, and Dicky, wishing for reasons of his own to be in Henrietta's good graces, had grudgingly consented.

Dicky was at the stage when outward forms and ceremonies mean very little, and any religious beliefs that exist are things to ignore as completely as possible. He felt it rather beneath him to admit the necessity for any power other than his own, and he looked upon Raven's profession and habits with the pitying eye of a man of the world of nineteen. Having avoided week-day services hitherto with great skill, he assumed an air of polite aloofness, and, as Raven ascended the pulpit, sat back and folded his arms prepared to be indulgent.

Twenty minutes later, while the hymn was being sung, the indulgent air had quite departed, and there was a somewhat ruffled look about him, while Henrietta, her clever, charming face unwontedly serious, studied her hymn-book closely, and took very little notice of the congregation.

"Is Raven coming home now?" Pauline enquired, as they emerged from the crowded church into the fresh night air. "He must be worn out."

"I'm afraid I don't know, dear," Mrs. Cardew answered, rather apologetically. "You see his movements are so different to ours, and I never enquire into them."

"He'll probably have a guild meeting or hear confessions," Henrietta remarked. "Thank Heaven I'm not in his shoes."

"Heaven, I'm sure, appreciates your gratitude," Dicky retorted. "But Pauline is right. Raven looked jolly fagged. I say! he talked pretty straight about Lent, didn't he?"

"Naturally," Henrietta said. "It's his job. Besides, he thinks that way."

"So do we, I hope," Mrs. Cardew chirped. "Henrietta, darling, you do say such odd things. Aren't you coming in, dear?"

They had reached the Rectory, and Henrietta had drawn back, and now, in answer to her mother's question, she looked at Dicky.

"No. I'm going on to a studio rag at the Orchards," she said, a little note of hurried defi-

ance in her tone. "It's an old promise, mother, and Dicky is coming."

"No, I'm not," Dicky said unexpectedly. "I don't feel like it after old Raven's remarks. Cut it, Henrietta! It won't be much fun anyway."

The door was open now into the charming, old-fashioned hall, and Mrs. Cardew, undecided whether to disapprove or not, paused just within the house, and looked at her daughter beneath protesting brows.

"Is it a big dance?" she asked, and Henrietta hastened to answer.

"Oh, no," she said, "only twenty or thirty people. You needn't mind, mother. It's absolutely harmless. Dicky, don't be an idiot! Of course you'll come."

"Of course I won't! No, really, Henrietta. I'll get Billy to fetch you home. Give my love to Chelsea, and tell them they didn't intrigue me sufficiently. So long!"

He waved to his indignant sister and ran upstairs to his own particular den, whereupon Henrietta stamped.

"Oh, damn! How perfectly infuriating! I wish he'd never gone to hear Raven if that's how he's going to behave. I'll have to ring up a taxi."

"You won't be late, dear?" her mother enquired, and Henrietta shook her head.

"Certainly not. I'll be back just after twelve. Good night, every one. Dicky will have to fetch

me home. Tell him, Pauline. I shall wait for him."

She took off her little brocade cap, tossed it on to a table, let her big, fur cape fly back to show her flame-coloured dance frock beneath, and departed, while Pauline, feeling unable to bear her mother's gentle, aimless conversation, bade every one good night, and went to her boudoir. There she slipped off her outer things, and drawing a big chair up to the fire, sat down to think. Two days ago Desmond's letter had arrived, and since then she had read it and re-read it, treasuring it as the tangible evidence that the happenings of that strange Monday had been no dream as they sometimes seemed to her. It was a letter that would have astonished his friends could they have seen it, written late at night in his room at the Hotel de la Paix, where, so he said, he expected to be about a fortnight, before going on to the south, where Madge intended to stay at least a month.

Now, as she sat there she tried not to think of the future or see it as it must be—a future, where in name at least, her lover would be another woman's husband, but she had been through more than most women, and the future obtruded itself into her thoughts. She could not help praying that some alternative might arise—yet, what could? There was no way out of a situation that was more, so she felt, than she could bear. Her whole heart and soul had gone out to the strange,

tempestuous man who had played so unworthy a part in life, and who yet was neither coward nor cur. She knew, as surely as though her love had been an intimate part of her life for years, that he was capable of great deeds, of great good as well as great evil. Those unforgettable hours when they had been alone in Eve's sitting-room had told her more than years of ordinary intimacy could have done. She knew the man she loved, his life, his habits, his weaknesses, his sins—and loved him the more, and believed in him with all her heart. He had not spared himself or her; it had been a confession as complete as though he were on his death-bed—and knowing his manner to the world, his life and temperament, as others knew it, she could only wonder, very humbly, what in herself could give her such power over him.

Presently rising, she went across to her bureau and began to write; a letter that was at first strangely difficult, but later became an unconscious outpouring of her very soul. It was very late when she had finished, too late for the servants to post it, and somehow she felt it would be all the nearer to its destination if she put it in the pillar-box, even though the last post had gone. There was a box just outside the house, so, wrapping a big cloak round her, she crept downstairs to the hall, where a light still switched on told her that the entire household had not yet gone to bed. The moon was brilliant, as she let herself out into the

silent street and hurried across the pavement; and as she turned back she thought how wonderful it must be over Paris—Paris! Was Desmond asleep, or did he, too, look at the serene beauty of the sky, and suffer?

She paused on the doorstep, looking up at the quiet stars, and a great nostalgia took her, a wild agonised longing for the world that is very far off, where Love and Love only reigns supreme. Her throat contracted with a spasm of pain, she felt as though her heart were burning within her, putting her hand on the lintel to steady herself she turned and stood looking to the south, and, almost unconsciously, words came aloud to her lips.

“Our Father, which art in Heaven—our Father—keep him, bless him, help him . . . my own, dear love.”

As a child she had always loved to say her prayers by an open window looking at the sky—she had explained then, to a questioning parent, that she could “feel God” better, and now, a woman who had borne much suffering, she still kept the same desire. To her, the immensity of the heavens called as instinctively upon man to pray, as the sun called upon him to feel its warmth. Prayer was an integral part of her being, a necessity, beyond those of ordinary daily existence. Her soul turned to prayer as a flower turns to the light, and all her life through the unseen world had



been to her, a very real place. She prayed as naturally as she breathed, but she did not always gain any conscious satisfaction of the soul from prayer; often she was aware of a barrier, between herself and the Infinite, a thing almost tangible in its density; there was nothing of emotionalism in her religious attitude of mind, nothing erotic in her sense of the Divine. The things of the Spirit were in every sense of the Spirit to her, not, as to so many, a mere cloak for a species of religious and incorporeal dissipation.

Yet she gained no comfort to-night from the prayer offered for the man she loved: her heart felt dead within her save for the burning ache of pain, and her mind was weighed down by the effort of life itself.

Turning away from the quiet night she closed the door, and was going upstairs when a sound from somewhere in the house attracted her attention, and she stopped to listen. There was a scuffle, something was knocked down, and hastily, Pauline opened the door leading to the kitchens to be considerably relieved, even if a little startled, to find the disturbance caused by Henrietta's Persian kitten, evidently in chase of a mouse.

She closed the door just as a latchkey opened the hall door, to admit Raven, who started at sight of her, and stood just within the door.

"You—is anything wrong?" he asked, and Pauline shook her head.

"No. I have just posted a letter. How tired you look, Raven. Have you been working after that service?"

"It was a sick call," he said shortly. Pauline glanced at her watch; it was nearly one.

"When did you have some food last?" she enquired.

He looked a trifle surprised at her question.

"I don't remember—oh—yes, I had some dinner at the clergy-house. Don't stand about. You'll get cold, and it's very late."

"I can guess what kind of a dinner it was at the clergy-house in Lent," she said quietly, ignoring the hint. "You have been under a great strain for some hours. Go on into your study and wait there until I come."

He obeyed, rather to her surprise, and she went off to explore the kitchen regions, appearing in the study, after ten or twelve minutes, with a beaten-up egg in hot milk for him, and tea for herself. The fire was out, the room icily cold and drearier even than usual, and at the sight she shivered.

"This is impossible. Come up to my sitting-room, there is a good fire there, and you can drink this in peace," she said, but he demurred.

"It's too late. Besides—I have been at a death-bed."

"Well?" she looked at him with steady eyes. "Was it—infectious?"

"No. Accident."

"Very well. Why not take off your cassock and put on a dressing gown, and rest comfortably for ten minutes?"

He stood quite still by the writing-table, not attempting to follow her advice, and when he spoke his tone was not encouraging.

"I have no dressing gown . . . and I am not in the mood to make conversation. Since you have been kind enough to bring—that," he glanced at the tray, "I will drink it, and I am grateful. But I am not good company to-night for any one . . . I am better alone."

Pauline drew her breath rather sharply. She was not accustomed to hostility from any man, and Raven's persistence in keeping her at a distance hurt her. She felt that his natural aloofness was rapidly passing into a personal dislike, and just now, stripped of her conventional armour by the demand Desmond had made upon her, she felt singularly defenceless. Without a word she put the milk onto the table, took up the tray, and went to the door.

"I am sorry to have made myself such a nuisance to you," she said, a little hint of scorn in her voice. "But it is obvious that even a priest occasionally needs food. Good-night."

He bowed, followed her over to the door, and opened it.

"It was very kind of you to trouble," he said formally. "Thank you. Good night."

He held the door open till she had reached the hall, then closed it, and stood quite still, looking at nothing in particular, yet seeing as clearly as though she were still there, her slender figure in its loose fur-trimmed, velvet gown.

Pauline set the tray in the hall; she had had not the least desire for tea, but had thought he would be more likely to drink the milk she had heated if he did not drink alone, but now, bitterly hurt by both his words and behaviour, she went straight up to her room.

She did not understand her brother's behaviour, it seemed both unnecessary and unkind; and as she lay in bed she came to the conclusion that he resented her presence in the house, for reason best known to himself.

"I don't think I am more unsuitable in a rectory than Henrietta," she said half-aloud, as she lay looking at the faint, grey square of the window. "I suppose he dislikes my type."

The thought hurt her more than she cared to admit; she had suffered so much that her home had appeared very precious, but it was evident that, to the master of the house, at all events, she was unwelcome, and consequently the only thing was to make other arrangements.



CHAPTER XI

THE winter had left Paris for good, and in the avenues and along the boulevards the chest-nut buds were fat and brown and sticky on the trees, and daffodils, wild hyacinths, and slender, scented narcissi made every hawker's basket or barrow a splash of colour and scent.

Desmond, who was staying at the Hotel St. James, et Albion, came down about ten o'clock from his room on the Monday before Easter, and stood in the vestibule of the hotel, glancing idly at the morning paper he had just purchased.

It was a wonderful morning, Paris was full, and the very air seemed alive with youth, and the excitement that is more potent than wine, yet Desmond felt neither the excitement nor the call of youth, but only an intense disgusted weariness. He looked ill, his face was haggard, with deep lines drawn about the mouth and shadows beneath the eyes, that spoke of either great mental unhappiness or dissipation. Certainly, most of his French friends, knowing him, would have put it down to the latter, but in reality there was nothing to cause that look save sleeplessness and general discontent. The despair which had seized him on leaving England had settled into a sullen acceptance of

life as he had himself made it, and an equal endurance of the company in which he found himself. Madge Cardew, who was at the newly decorated Hotel de Louvre et de la Paix, found herself saddled with a man, who, after the claims of politeness were satisfied, certainly did his best to avoid her society.

He was not actually neglectful; if she requested him to escort her anywhere he assented at once, he generally dined with her, took her once a week to the Opera, and constantly to the theatres, spent a good deal of money on her, and never by any chance made love to her. She resented the fact none the less bitterly because she did not comment on it, and every defection was a thing she stored up in her memory against him.

This particular morning she was expecting him to take her to call at Autueul, to the house of a Belgian friend of hers, Madame Lensky, and Desmond, who had met Madame Lensky in London, detested the idea of going. He knew quite well that the news of Madge's impending divorce had reached the whole circle of their mutual acquaintances, and more and more as the days passed did he resent and hate his position as Madge's accepted lover. This morning, too, owing to a break-down of some kind on the line, the English mail was late, and as he expected news from home, and hoped for a letter from Pauline, he was annoyed at the delay.



There was no news of interest in the papers and he tossed them aside, and directly the letters came, went out into the fresh brilliance of the spring morning, followed by various glances, and heedless of everything but his own weariness of spirit. He had been in Paris three weeks, and those weeks had been the longest of his life. The days had been a succession of meaningless occupations, the nights sheer torture, and as he strolled through into the Champs Elysées, he realised that this aimless existence could not go on. He could not continue the life he was leading, and what else to do he did not know. He felt ill in body as well as worn out in mind, and he knew that this ceaseless craving for Pauline would drive him soon to something desperate unless he could force his thoughts into other channels.

Reaching a quiet seat some little way back from the path, he took out his letters, and looked hurriedly for Pauline's handwriting. It was not there, and the knowledge came to him like a physical blow. He was conscious of a sick disappointment, and for a moment or two sat looking at nothing. He was in the state of mind that is a prey to nervous imaginings, unworthy fears, recurrent and senseless despairs; and sudden anxiety thrilled him, anxiety, lest she should be ill, perhaps dying. He half rose from his seat, eyes dilated, face drawn, then common-sense reasserted itself and he dropped back, and taking off his hat

passed his handkerchief over his damp forehead. Then remembering his other letters, he opened them one by one. The first was a bill, the second an invitation forwarded by Eve, the third and fourth from men friends, the fifth from his father. He left that till last, opening it reluctantly. He had always had a warm and affectionate respect for his father, and the thought of his anger and bitter disappointment was painful. When he had read the brief lines through, his face was set and grim, and he stuffed all the letters away, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, stared at the gravel in front of him with dull eyes.

Lord Clere's letter had been quite short, and its tone was what Desmond had not dared to hope for—the kind, yet stern enquiry, the brief refusal to believe the worst until confirmed by Desmond himself, the statement that he intended leaving immediately after his letter for Paris—would he book a room for him at the hotel—was so like Lord Clere, scrupulously fair, generous, dignified, yet through it all ran a note of bitterest disappointment that he had not been able to disguise.

Desmond sat for a long time thinking over the problem of the immediate future. In commonest decency to Madge he could not leave her if she wished him to stay, and equally, he could not return to town and compromise Pauline by being seen with her. Very soon the divorce would come on, and afterwards he would be expected to marry



Madge—and he had given his word to do so. Moving restlessly, he felt a sharp stab of pain through his head, cursed it for neuralgia, to which he had recently become prone, and rising, made slow way back to the wide pavement. He was utterly ennuyé with life; even books and music failed him. He had tried in vain to read, for he was a great and discriminating reader, and he had tried to drown his thoughts in music, which he loved. The result had been absolutely negative. Books failed to hold him, music brought Pauline's face and the knowledge of all he had lost so poignantly before him that he found it unbearable.

He naturally knew a number of people in Paris, but did not wish to meet any of them, for although he had cared little enough in the old days for any scandal attached to his name, now he hated the things that would be said, for Pauline's sake. Then, too, the absolute cessation of occupation, the breaking of all ties and habits worked its evil with him, and he found himself not only idle but far from well. He had always been the possessor of superb health, and, in addition, had made almost an idol of his body, spending hours daily in keeping muscles and nerves in perfect condition by regular and vigorous exercise. While free from conceit, he had never pretended that he was unconscious of his remarkable looks and figure; indeed, to have done so would have been absurd, and he had taken care never to mar what he admired by the over-

indulgence or the slackness that entraps so many wealthy, young men. Now, to find that body playing him false by obtruding its needs and ills upon his consciousness, added to his depression, and irritated his nerves. He resented physical discomfort because he had never been conscious of his body except as a means to very acute pleasures; he had never been ill except as the result of a hunting accident and two wounds, which, after all, according to his ideas, were purely extraneous, and not the result of disease or organic weakness. The broken leg of the hunting field, the bayonet-thrust of Ypres, and the shell-splinter of later date, had healed and left neither ache nor pain behind them, but this present discomfort was that of vague *malaise*, of neuralgic headache, of sleeplessness, and, worst of all, the grinding ache of the so sharply checked senses, and now driven by the ceaseless yearning for one beloved woman.

He walked slowly along in the sunshine, taking heed of nothing, absorbed in his own thoughts. The thought of the interview with his father added to the dull, dragging discomfort of his body, was reducing him to a state in which he hardly knew himself. A voice uttering his name jerked him back to realities, and he halted at the corner of the rue Washington because two people stood in his path and spoke to him: the Baroness de Vaucelin and her sister, Hester Pryce.

"I said it was you, Lord Desmond, and Hester contradicted me—my! but you look bad!"

The Baroness was an American from the middle West, rather plain, exceedingly smart, and the despair of her very artistocratic Belgian relatives; papa had been a retail butcher, and made money over a cold-storage scheme, and Bella didn't care who knew it, arguing that if dollars were good enough to spend, their origin was good enough to be frank about.

Desmond liked her; they had first made acquaintance through his brother, Easton, who knew Maurice de Vauclin in the days when she was still Bella Pryce—Pryce being the name of the cold-storage gentleman—and now he was relieved that if any one had to cross his path it was Bella de Vauclin, and not any of his mother's friends. Hester, who was even more reminiscent of the Stars and Stripes, and several degrees plainer, was, like the Baroness, warm-hearted and generous, and she was as shocked as her sister at Desmond's appearance.

"What *have* you been doing, Lord Desmond?" she enquired. "You look like a ghost. Have you been sick?"

He looked from one pair of bright, kind, brown eyes to the other.

"No, thank you—I'm well enough," he said. "I did not know you were in Paris."

"We arrived at Cherbourg last night . . . Where are you staying? We're at the Crillon. We always go there, it's so bright. Is your dear mother over here?"

He made a hasty answer, enquired after the Baron, and was invited to lunch at their hotel.

"Now, do say 'yes,'" Bella said. "I'm just so glad to see any of my English friends again that I can't seem to part with them. You're staying alone, you say? Well, if you're not already engaged, say right now that you'll come."

Desmond was in the state when he loathed his own company and hated his fellow men, but Bella and Hester were so wholesome and so different from the remainder of his acquaintances, and were so disappointed over his refusal that he changed his mind, apologised, accepted, and left them with a promise to be at the hotel at a quarter-past one.

"He looks real bad!" Hester remarked, as she turned along in the rue Washington with her sister. "There's something downright wrong there."

"Poor boy!" Bella was a year Desmond's junior, but she felt motherly when her sympathies were moved. "Perhaps he's in love. We'll hear, Hester . . . don't worry him," and Hester relapsed into silence so far as Desmond was concerned, though allowing him and his possible affairs an important place in her thoughts.

Desmond, aware that he must attend to Lord Clere's request, meanwhile went back to his hotel,



booked a room for that night, and went to the hotel du Louvre to see Madge. She was not yet down, he was told, but she appeared a very few moments after her message—a charming creature to look at, dressed in a Callot gown of black and white, with some chinchilla furs, which Desmond had recently given her. She came up to him, smiling.

"You are an unexpected visitor," she remarked. "Will you come up to my sitting-room or shall we go out? I'm lunching with some friends, but it's still quite early."

"We might as well go out if you're ready," Desmond said. "I wanted to see you before to-night."

"That is something quite new," she remarked. "Lately, you have not wanted to see me at all—oh, don't protest, my dear! I'm quite content! We shall see enough of one another for the term of our natural lives once we are married. What is it you want to see me about? I imagine you have some reason other than the desire to tell me how you adore me."

His nostrils dilated; she could always anger him, though he despised himself for not being able to laugh at her little digs at his pride, and now he took refuge in silence because he did not want openly to lose his patience. She did not repeat her question, but walked along by his side quite content to know that her shaft had gone home, and after a minute or two he spoke.

"I have had a letter from my father this morn-

ing," he said. "He arrives in Paris this evening."

"Indeed?" Madge's voice was dangerously sweet. "Hoping, I suppose, to rescue you from my clutches? Poor Lord Clere! What a wasted journey."

"I imagine he wishes to know the truth," Desmond said, rather unwisely, and Madge took the chance instantly.

"And what is the truth?" she said, and looked up at him with eyes that dared him to answer. "Do you propose to tell him that you're so deeply in love that you cannot live without me?"

Desmond was silent, cursing his stupidity in giving her such an opening, and she laughed a little and repeated her question.

"Do you?" she enquired. "Do you?"

She was not a woman to be turned from her purpose, and he knew he must answer.

"No," he said at last. "I do not."

She gave her little ripple of laughter that he had once liked to hear.

"You are certainly a brave man," she said. "But you are not flattering me, are you?"

He turned his head and looked down at her with narrowed eyes.

"Do you wish me to?" he said curtly.

She met the look, and anger flamed in her heart, for she knew she was charming, that men admired her—knew that she had allure as well as beauty—and she had given this man every favour, had per-



mitted him to pass all barriers, and was rewarded by his hatred. She was devoid of sex attraction for this one man, and because of it she desired him more than any other. When she spoke next it was to return to the subject of his father's arrival.

"I imagine Lord Clere will not wish to see me," she said. "I will find another escort for the Opera. You can dine with him and have your evening free. Will that do?"

Her tone was quite pleasant, and Desmond, aware that he was behaving atrociously, took her cue.

"If that is convenient to you I shall be glad," he said. "I certainly wish to get our first interview over as soon as possible. Shall I come round afterwards?"

Her fingers tightened on each other inside her muff, but her tone was airy.

"If you like. And find me a really intriguing place for supper. We have been so respectable lately. Take me to Montmartre or the Quartier. And as it is later than I thought I will take a taxi out to Neuilly. Call one, please."

He hailed a taxi and put her in, and the spring breeze, suddenly whisking round a corner, caught him, as he stood hat in hand, and ruffled up his hair from its conventional smoothness to a wavy mass of dusky gold.

Madge was a true pagan in her worship of physical perfection, her eyes suddenly darkened at the

sight, travelling from his hair to his powerful shoulders and lean waist, so well shown in the grey overcoat he wore; she thought of the only other time—four weeks ago now—when she had seen him with hair roughened and trying to curl, and drew her breath rather sharply. It had been on the night when she had made her fatal decision—the only night they had spent together, the one and only time Desmond had, in truth, been her lover.

As for Desmond, he was quite unconscious of the thoughts he had aroused, and, after seeing the taxi off, made his way to the rue Madeleine, wondering why he had accepted the invitation after all. But Fate had yet another small shock for him in the person of an acquaintance of his mother's family, a Mrs. Dennison, who, with her daughter-in-law and two friends, was waiting in the vestibule, and as Desmond sent in his name, she turned round, met his eye, and gave him an exceedingly frigid bow, while her daughter-in-law, who had been very much one of Madge's boon companions, ignored him entirely.

He took their attitude calmly enough, but the incident made him realise that even Madge, despite her belief in herself, would find the face of the world changed, and it was with a mind, certainly no more at ease, that he went forward to meet Bella de Vauclin, who came hurrying from the lift.



"Now that's real good of you, Lord Desmond!" she exclaimed, as they shook hands. "For I expect you've hundreds of engagements, but it's so long since we'd seen you, Hester and I, that we couldn't forego the chance of a real talk. Why, there's Mrs. Dennison—are you staying here with her?"

She was bowing and smiling to the icy Mrs. Dennison, and so did not see the look on Desmond's face, but she did notice a very marked expression of surprise in that good lady's eyes and lifted brows, and wondered for a moment what she had done. Then, good naturedly, forgot all about it, and led the way to the restaurant.

"Hester's gone in to make sure we don't lose our table," she remarked, as they went across to the window. "Ah! there she is. Now we'll be able to have a real, good time. Sit there, Lord Desmond."

She fussed cheerfully over ordering luncheon, but was so manifestly pleased with life that Desmond could not be irritated, and did his best to be entertaining until he saw, to his annoyance, that the Dennisons were sitting at a table close by.

When the room was almost empty, luncheon nearly over, and even Bella could not help observing Mrs. Dennison's disapproving glances, Hester made a remark that had been trembling on her lips for the last hour.

"You'll be interested to know I'm about to be married, Lord Desmond," she said, blushing heart-

ily and smiling widely. "And to an Englishman, too. Think of that. John Townsend—he's member for East Broom. Do you know him?"

"I've met him. Very clever fellow, too," Desmond answered with proper enthusiasm. "Please accept my very best wishes. I'm delighted. When's it to be?"

"Early in June . . . in London, of course. You must promise to come to my wedding—won't you?"

In June, the public would have the ineffable bliss of reading a divorce scandal, bringing in famous names. Desmond's lips set, his eyes narrowed, and his unexpected silence drew Bella's attention as well as her sister's.

"Why, Lord Desmond," he heard her say. "You look like a ghost. Are you sick?"

Annoyed that he had shown any sign of his thoughts, he answered quickly:

"No, thanks—I'm perfectly well. But—I'm afraid I shall not be able to come to your wedding, Miss Pryce. I may not be in London."

"Not come?" Hester echoed blankly. "But that's a great disappointment. And in the season, too. Are you going abroad?"

"No," he said, wishing to heaven he could make his brain work at its normal rate, and then, catching a blank stare from the younger Mrs. Dennison, he made a sudden decision.



"I have something to tell you both," he said, speaking in a hard, emotionless voice. "It is only fair to tell you—for your own sakes. Baroness—Miss Pryce, I am—I have——" he was finding it infinitely less easy that he had supposed. "I am about to be cited as co-respondent in a divorce case. That is why I'm in Paris. So you see I could not come to your wedding, and I ought not to have come here to lunch with you. I am sure you will understand if I ask you to excuse me now—and I hope——" he paused a moment, careful not to look at either of them. "I hope you will forgive me for coming at all to-day."

There was an instant's utter silence, then Bella de Vauclin spoke:

"Hester is not a young girl, neither am I," she said. "We prefer not to judge our friends. The only reason for being sorry about to-day is: if you really don't want to see us, and that I find hard to believe. Lord Desmond, I am not going to ask any questions, but I feel there's something behind this—otherwise, with the prospect of ultimately marrying the woman you love, you wouldn't look as you do, even with the unpleasantness of the Divorce Court ahead of you. I don't want to ask any questions. But Hester and I would be pleased if you'd come and see us at our hotel. Ring up. We're here for a fortnight."

He held her hand closely for a moment, and

looked down at her, aware that he did not find it too easy to speak; and she put her other hand over his, and patted it.

"You know, you've been rather brief," she said. "But if we don't ask questions it's because we don't want to intrude. But anyway, believe me when I say we want you not to let it make any difference. And now, good-bye for the present, and good luck."



CHAPTER XII

DINNER was over, coffee and liqueurs had replaced port, and many of the tables had been vacated, yet Lord Clere and his son still sat on, talking at intervals, yet for the most part rather silent, each shrinking, unconsciously, from the moment when pretence must be given up, and the thing that was occupying both their minds, faced.

The Marquis of Clere, in his sixtieth year, was tall, and still young of figure, with iron grey hair and pointed beard, keen eyes, and stern, rather sad mouth. He had not found life all he had expected, and of late had had a good deal of trouble of one sort and another, and his wife was not the kind of woman to give him aid. He had always been rather an unapproachable man, very conservative in his ideas, and with so good a control of his emotions that it was hard to believe sometimes that he had any.

He had greeted his son almost as usual, had been a courteous, if slightly formal, guest at dinner, and there had been no hint between them of the matter that was so vital to them both, or that the meeting had in it anything out of the ordinary. At last, when the recurring silences had become too oppressive, Desmond took the plunge.

"You wanted to see me with regard to this—

this divorce," he said in a hard voice. "Hadn't we better get to it?"

Lord Clere pulled his beard, regarding his empty coffee-cup with a slight frown. It shocked him to hear the matter so bluntly referred to, and he read into it a certain callous disregard for the decencies of life which was unpardonable. So his voice was severe when he answered his son's remark.

"I certainly did wish to see you," he said. "And as the matter is so regrettable, I suggest you tell me, as briefly as possible, the occurrences that have led to this situation."

"Did not my mother tell you?" Desmond enquired, without looking up.

"Your mother's account was not so coherent as I could have wished. Surely you realise what she must have suffered by your action."

A faint smile twisted Desmond's lips; his knowledge of his mother did not contain any vivid memory of her powers of suffering—compared to what he had himself suffered. The state of her feelings was a very negligible quantity.

"I am sorry to have caused her anxiety," he said, faintly ironical.

Lord Clere looked at him sharply.

"You do not seem to appreciate the seriousness of your position," he said. "To be cited as correspondent is not exactly an honour."

The half-cynical little smile left Desmond's mouth, and his face hardened.



"I was not aware that I regarded it as such," he answered shortly.

"Then give me the information for which I have asked," Lord Clere said.

Desmond left off studying his liqueur glass, and looked up.

"I am ready to answer any questions you wish to put to me," he said in a hard voice.

The elder man made a gesture of impatience.

"Questions? Questions?" he repeated. "I have no wish to question you. You are not a child. You are quite well aware what it is necessary for me to know, and it is that information I require."

Desmond was silent for a moment, then he began to speak, stating, as briefly as he could, the circumstances which had led to the climax, omitting only that which followed concerning Pauline. When the short statement was over, Lord Clere was silent for a few moments; then he put an abrupt question.

"I do not quite understand what happened about Brighton. Did you take Mrs. Cardew with you?"

"No," Desmond said briefly.

"Then how was it she was there? Had the two of you pre-arranged the meeting?"

"No," he said again. "Neither of us; we met by accident."

His father drew a quick breath; narrow as his creed was, it was at least that of an honourable

gentleman, and Desmond's answer gave him the first feeling of relief he had experienced since his arrival in town. Instead of continuing the questions, as he longed to do, until he got the real truth, he was silent for a moment, and when he spoke there was a subtle change in his tone.

"I suppose you will be married as soon as the affair is concluded?" he said, and Desmond answered, without looking up:

"Of course, yes."

Lord Clere was not a particularly observant man, but he could not help realising that Desmond's face was expressionless as a mask. For the first time he regretted that he did not know his son better.

"Mrs. Cardew is here in Paris, I presume," he said, after a slight uncomfortable pause, and again Desmond said briefly:

"Yes."

Vainly the elder man sought for some means of discovering the truth, and, by sheer chance, stumbled on to the key to the situation in his endeavour to find some common ground of sympathy with this son of his, whom he realised was, after thirty-two years, a complete stranger, for he made a grave remark that had a strange effect.

"I am sorry your love for her led you into this impasse."

"My love?"

The words, with their short laugh, were out before Desmond could check them, and startled Lord



Clere out of his vexation and perplexity. He put down his cigarette and looked keenly at his son, and something in the white, hardened face awakened memories, irrelevantly enough, of the days when Desmond had been a little boy, whose beauty was the wonder of his world. A sudden yearning awoke in his heart, a desire to recapture that little boy, to bridge the gulf between them now, when that same little boy, a grown man, sat staring, unseeingly, at an empty glass, with hard misery stamped upon his face.

"You mean you do not love her?" he said. "Desmond—can you not trust me with the truth? I feel—I am sure, there is something behind all this."

Desmond started. These were almost the same words as Bella de Vauclin had used. Did he then carry his heart on his sleeve? He drew a long breath, and his fingers clenched so suddenly on the slender stem of the little glass that it snapped. With a low exclamation he withdrew his hand, the blood starting from his fingers, and Lord Clere passed his handkerchief across the table. He felt a sudden, extraordinary desire to get near this son of his, to break down a barrier of the existence of which he had only just become aware, and when Desmond took the handkerchief and bound it round his hand, he felt strangely relieved.

As for Desmond, the incident, sharply painful as it was, came as a welcome relief to a situation

that was fast becoming impossible. His father's attitude was so different to that which he had expected that he found it difficult to remain as formal with him as he desired. Then, too, he had, by his own idiotic loss of control, given himself away, and refuted even, if not in words, any idea of love for Madge. Such a state of things would necessarily lead to awkward questions, and his father's sudden change of manner had made those questions very difficult to evade.

Seeing the accident, a waiter rushed forward, there was a slight commotion, and then the two men left their table and made their way to the big, palm-fringed lounge, where dancing was in progress, and where they would be as undisturbed by all the amusement-hunting world around them as if they were on a desert island.

It was Lord Clere who spoke first, after they were comfortably ensconced in a remote corner.

"Desmond," he said, and perhaps if that little accident had not touched his heart in a wholly strange way, he would have found it impossible to say the words. "I feel that I am in part responsible for this tragic affair. If I had been more to you—if I had endeavoured to become a friend, to enter into your life, this might not have happened."

Such words were so utterly foreign to Desmond, to all he had ever known of his father, that he looked across at him in amazement, and for a moment did not know what to say. Lord Clere,



however, saved him the trouble. Instead of reverting to his customary manner, he uttered some still more amazing words; amazing to himself as well as to the man who listened, words that seemed forced from him, born in the strange agitation that had awakened his long-smothered love for his son.

"That being the case," he said very quietly, yet with a curious note of suppressed feeling in his voice. "That being so—will you forgive me, Desmond, for the share I have had in your unhappiness?"

Desmond started violently, caught his breath, then for the first time looked at his father.

"You have had no share in it, sir," he said, after a moment. "It has been entirely and absolutely my fault. You must understand that. Mine—and no one else's."

Lord Clere returned the look with one strangely different from the detached regard with which he usually surveyed his fellow men, and something in his eyes touched Desmond to a response he had before found himself unable to make; acting on that novel impulse of affection for his father, he stretched out his hand across the table, not so much in fellowship as in a rare humility.

"It is for me to ask your forgiveness," he said, almost below his breath—"and . . . I do, for everything."



CHAPTER XIII

EASTER DAY found London basking in golden sunshine, with the trees in the parks bursting into leaf, and the buds unfolding on the lilac bushes of the Squares. Pauline had intended to visit friends for Easter, but a slight cold had prevented her from doing so, and she was glad not to have left town after all, for Mrs. Cardew went to bed with a chill, and was so unusually depressed that she had to rouse herself from contemplation of her own affairs and endeavour to cheer her.

Since that fateful evening she had only exchanged with Raven the barest formalities courtesy demanded. He had hurt her very deeply, and she had been hurt so much in her life that she found unkindness from her own kith and kin hard to forget; yet, when on Good Friday she went to St. Peter's, Knightsbridge, where Raven was preaching, and heard his addresses at the Three Hours' Service, her hurt resentment was lost in contemplation of his great gifts, and she felt she could sit listening thus for ever to words which so vividly painted the picture and the aim of the World's Tragedy.

Sincerely religious as she was, Pauline was not given to emotionalism in spiritual things. Her re-



ligion was too deep for that; faith had been won through too great suffering to be the easy, facile thing of tears and feelings that it is to so many women, yet Raven's preaching moved her profoundly. It had the supreme gift of a picture, without attracting attention to the artist, of presenting a scene and awakening a spiritual desire without obtruding itself as a means.

To Pauline, as she listened, the great figures surrounding that central and greatest Figure lived and moved, swayed by their varying temperaments and desires, in a way they had never done for her before. Judas, whose very name has come to posterity as a synonym for treachery, and Caiaphas, subtle, scheming, ambitious priest, jealous for his order and his own power; Barabbas, scarcely known except by name, ignorant, criminal, barbaric, and the two so intimately connected with the supreme Figure, Pontius Pilate and Saint Peter. To Pauline the figure of the Roman governor was one of infinite pathos, despite his culpable weakness and its awful consequences. His attempts to escape the giving of the sentence—at first dignified, as befitted the representative of the greatest authority on earth, then agitated, lastly almost desperate, seemed to her to bear witness of a convulsion of the man's very soul. Judaea was no bed of roses, and the man who was sent to govern it was generally one who was being given a chance to retrieve some past mistake. Pilate feared and rev-

erenced Cæsar; he was no Jew, learned in the prophecies of a coming Messiah, he had been brought up in a hard school even though he was a patrician of Rome, and to him these half-barbarians, these cowardly, hypocritical, yet truculent, Jews, were, along with their religion, contemptible.

Yet here before him was brought a Prisoner such as he had never seen before, a Prisoner whose majestic bearing disturbed him strangely, whose regard struck a chill of awe to the depths of his very soul, whose crime was that He had stated Himself to be the Son of the Living God, and yet—a Jew!

Pilate, at least, had the understanding to realise that here was no ordinary criminal; he instinctively recognised a Man at once noble and innocent. His questions, forced from him by the strange conflicting fears of his soul, showed that he treated this Prisoner as he would never treat the common offender. To his Roman mind, with its modern scepticism, the entire religion of the Jewish race was but a barbaric and heathen superstition; it was not the prophecies of a Messiah that troubled him; naturally he regarded such prophecy as treason to Rome. He did not realise what he was doing; the very answers he received, gentle, patient, strangely compassionate, showed that; what he did realise was that he, the representative of justice, was condemning an innocent man to a dreadful death, through fear for his own position.



And Peter, wild, tempestuous, loving soul, with the opposing faults of his very virtues; Peter, who denied the Lord he had himself proclaimed in a burst of ardent faith to be the Christ; Peter, who for forty years toiled and wept and suffered to wipe out the stain of his sin; Peter, whose cowardice became all courage, whose weakness all strength, whose love for that risen Lord burned as a flame to light the ages to come; Peter, who died in uttermost anguish of body and humble joy of soul; Peter the Fisherman, the greatest saint of God. He lived anew for Pauline as she listened to Raven's words, and she left the church that bore the great Apostle's name, exalted in spirit, strengthened in mind. And the next day Desmond's letter had come, relating his interview with his father, telling her anew of his love, asking her forgiveness once again for all he had done and been, and ending very humanly with a cry for her presence. Pauline carried the letter next her heart, smiling half-tenderly, half-amusedly, over such a youthful proceeding.

Luncheon was at two on Easter Day; and when the large congregation emptied itself out of St. Peter's, in the sunny street, there was a general movement towards the Park.

Mrs. Cardew, Henrietta, and Dicky were Pauline's companions; and, as they walked slowly in the sunshine, Dicky suddenly exclaimed:

"There's Wilmot!" and Pauline saw Eve and

Peter making their way across the road. There ensued greetings and a few minutes' conversation, then some other friends came up, Mrs. Cardew turned to them, and Eve drew Pauline a step or two aside.

"Pauline, Easton wants to go over to Paris and see Desmond. He wrote to him, but Desmond hasn't answered. Has he said anything in his letters to you?"

Pauline's lips parted, a faint colour stained the creamy pallor of her face at the mention of Desmond's name.

"No. He has said nothing," she said, after a moment. "I heard from him yesterday. He mentioned Lord Clere's visit." Eve nodded, and her brows drew together in a distressed fashion.

"I'm dreading the result of that meeting," she said. "Oh, Pauline, if only this waiting time were over! Mother is behaving absolutely impossibly, Aunt Clarissa makes her worse, and poor Easton simply hates meeting anybody. I'm sorry to talk about it on such a heavenly morning as this, but I can think of nothing else. Yes, Peter?"

For Peter Wilmot had touched her arm.

"I was just saying to Mrs. Cardew how fine Raven's preaching was on Good Friday," he said, looking at her significantly, adding later, when they had resumed their walk: "How was she to know I didn't hear him? It's quite safe praise, Raven's preaching is always fine. And if she'd seen you



were discussing the family skeleton, it would have spoiled her morning. By the way, what did Desmond say in his letter yesterday?"

"Little of importance. Madge talks of going to Italy till Whitsun. Oh, it's all so wretched! To think of Desmond wasting all these months, in this year of all years, when there is so much to do and so much happening; just throwing his life away!"

Peter glanced keenly at her; something in her tone attracted his attention. He had been aware of an ever-growing curiosity for some weeks, and now Eve's unguarded outburst roused a very definite suspicion.

"You can hardly expect him to agree with you," he said. "After all, if a man runs away with another man's wife it is to be presumed that he loves her." He paused a moment, but Eve did not rise to the bait, so he added carelessly enough: "So, as Desmond has got his heart's desire, why pity him?"

Eve made an inarticulate sound, but dearly as she loved to make a confidante of her husband, she was quite well aware of the fact that it would not do. First, because it was not her secret, and she had, as it were, tumbled upon it by accident. Second, because Peter would be incapable of understanding the true situation, and at that she could not but feel a sympathy with him. The bald facts were crude and ugly enough, yet she realised that the bald facts were less than half the truth; but,

after all, had she not been an eye-witness of part of the scene between Pauline and her brother, she could never, never have been made to understand, herself.

So she kept silence for a while, and when she spoke, spoke of entirely different matters, and left Peter none the wiser as to the truth, though with his suspicions more firmly grounded than ever. At St. Peter's Rectory there were two guests to luncheon, one Sir John Canning, who was a friend of Mrs. Cardew's, and who had recently returned from the South, the other a young barrister called Thurston. The latter was rather good-looking in an intellectual way; he was undoubtedly clever, but Pauline thought him conceited, and rather disliked him, but he was a constant visitor to the house, and Henrietta and he seemed rather close friends. Nevertheless, she was a little startled when, just at the end of luncheon, her mother checked Dicky, who was chattering loudly, and spoke in her gentle voice, so that every one should hear:

"Pauline, Billy, Dicky, I want to give you some very pleasing news, and this is quite the best day to receive it. Henrietta and Mr. Thurston"—she glanced from one to the other, smiling cordially—"have just told me of their engagement. I hope you will all give them your very best wishes." Dicky checked a whistle that would have been more eloquent of consternation than pleasure, Paul-



ine looked at Henrietta, and Billy rose and limped round the table to his future brother-in-law.

"Hearty congratulations, Thurston," he said. "You're in luck."

Later, in the big old-fashioned drawing-room, where the windows were open to the garden, letting in a balmy spring air, Pauline sought her sister.

"How very exciting, Henrietta," she exclaimed. "I had not the least idea you cared for Mr. Thurston. My dear, I'm *so* glad for your happiness. I hope you'll be very happy."

"Oh, yes, we shall be happy enough," Henrietta retorted, airily. "We like the same kind of things, and Hubert quite agrees with me that we shall be sensible and go our own way and have our own interests. So much more sensible. I'd hate to have him always hanging round, and I'm sure he would too. Thank heaven, we're modern."

Pauline smiled.

"You certainly are," she said. "When do you think of being married?"

"Some time this summer. I don't know. Oh, are you going, Hubert? Very well. Ring me up in the morning, and if you're good you can take me out to lunch. Good-bye, old thing!"

She held out her hand to him, nodded carelessly, then sank back in her chair by Pauline's side, and Hubert Thurston, apparently quite content, made his other farewells and went out of the room. Once the hall door had closed behind him, Dicky

flung down *The Observer* and glared at his twin, entirely careless of Sir John Canning.

"What in the name of heaven possessed you, Henrietta?" he demanded. "You must be mad! You're no more in love with that chap than I am. You can't be! He's a stick, a conceited empty-headed——"

"Steady, old man!"

Billy's remonstrance cut quietly across his tempestuous remarks, but Henrietta seemed quite cool.

"Don't be so idiotic, Dicky. Hubert is a clever man, and doesn't need me to champion him . . . and as I am going to marry him and not you, I fail to see why you're making such a fuss."

Her tone was impersonal but quite assured, and Pauline could not help contrasting her calmness with the feelings she herself would have had could she but have announced her engagement to Desmond Harbyn. Such would not bear thinking about, and she was glad that the door opened, a maid announced:

"Colonel and Mrs. Irvine, The Baroness de Vauclin."

The Irvines were friends of Mrs. Cardew's, but Bella de Vauclin had known Pauline in the years of her martyrdom, and had not seen her for a long while; so there was no further opportunity of discussing Henrietta's engagement, and the conversation became general as tea was brought in.

Billy, who had never before met Bella, liked her



promptly, and showed it in his calmly audacious way, and he and Sir John Canning came over to Pauline's corner near the fire, kicked Dicky out, and established themselves on the sofa in his place.

Presently, in course of conversation, it came out that Sir John knew friends of Bella de Vauclin's in San Francisco, also that he had spent a good deal of time in Honolulu, which she knew well, and islands near by.

From there was not too far a cry to China and the Middle East, and Sir John remarked that he was shortly going to China to study leprosy.

"I have been endeavouring to get there for years," he said. "But just as I had freed myself from London work, the war came on, and of course it was out of the question. Now, however, I really believe it to be possible, for I leave England next month."

"Good man!" Billy said, half under his breath, and Pauline's dark eyes glowed.

"If you could discover some cure!" she said, very softly. "What it would mean to the world's future! What it *must* mean!"

Sir John turned to her, and his rather stern face softened.

"I dare not hope for that where far wiser men than I have failed," he said; "but I do hope to discover something further that may lead ultimately to alleviation."

"You have just come back from the Pastern In-

stitute, haven't you?" Billy enquired, as he passed his cigarette case to Pauline. "Were you in Paris long?"

"Only a week. Before, I was in the South on a holiday. I think, by the way, Baroness, I saw you one day in Paris the week before last. You were lunching at Paillard's with another lady and a young man I had met for the first time a short while before."

Bella de Vauclin nodded.

"Why, yes, I was there with my sister. Yes, and Lord Desmond Harbyn. He's quite an old friend of mine. You say you don't know him very well?"

"By name, of course, but I had only met him once before," Sir John answered. "You spoke, Madame de Fleurian?" for Pauline had made a gesture that was tantamount to speech at Bella's mention of Desmond.

At Sir John's question Bella glanced carelessly at her, and what she saw arrested her attention, for Pauline was white to the lips, and her great dark eyes seemed darker than ever, as they searched Sir John's face with a hungry eagerness that would not be hidden. She spoke even as Bella watched her:

"How was Lord Desmond?" she said, and her voice, steady and quiet, yet gave the impression of some deep emotion hardly suppressed. "He is a friend of mine."

At such a statement, surprising in the circum-



stances, Billy shot a quick glance at his sister—in his knowledge Pauline had only met Desmond Harbyn once, and he became suddenly aware of tension in the atmosphere. Sir John alone, not knowing, answered briefly:

“He looked ill, I thought. But I had a very transitory glimpse of him. You would know more.”

He glanced at Bella as he spoke, and she seized the opportunity thus presented with avidity.

“He certainly is not well,” she remarked, turning her attention fully to Pauline. “I imagine it is not to be wondered at. We met him in the Rue de Bivoli, and I made him lunch with us. I did not understand then how matters were, Pauline, but he told us.”

“Yes?” Pauline’s eyes met Bella’s blue gaze very steadily. “I am glad he told you. And then?”

“There was no—then!” Bella answered. “But he refused to see us again. I can understand how he felt about it, though I told him he need not be that way. I’m sorry if you feel I’ve been disloyal to you as a family”—she glanced from one to the other—“but the situation was difficult.” Over Pauline’s white face crept the shadow of a smile and the smile set Bella’s astute brain working in a totally new direction; but Billy’s lips hardened: he was not at all sure how he felt about the whole business, and meanwhile Sir John Canning must

be completely mystified. Moving abruptly, he threw his newly-lighted cigarette into the fire and spoke in a manner that definitely changed the conversation.

"Your proposed work in China is tremendously interesting," he said. "Can't you tell us a little more about it? You start in a month, you say?"

The elder man who, having made several enquiries about Desmond Harbyn, was not nearly so mystified as Billy believed, took up the cue at once.

"Yes, I am going to a place called L'e Chung Hai—not very far inland from Canton. It is not very large, and it is quite a small European colony. Only about twenty people, I believe, but leprosy is very rife there, and the conditions are ideal for investigation. I hope to be away six or eight months, and then to return and work on the material I have gained."

"China is not the most peaceable country just at present, is it?"

It was Pauline who asked this question, and Sir John turned quickly to her; her type of beauty and her charm interested him, and he was very willing to talk to her.

"It is disturbed," he said now, in answer to her question. "There is undoubtedly a great deal of unrest and even violence in some parts, but I believe the south to be as quiet as it ever is. I think that it is useless to expect a peaceable settlement



of so vast a country, either as a monarchy or as a republic, without a great deal of this local strife. I do not think it will affect any work." As Billy continued to ask him questions, Pauline felt that she had been suitably polite, and turning to Bella spoke in an undertone:

"I am glad you treated Lord Desmond well," she said. "I suppose that is surprising to you, as you know the details of this miserable affair between my brother and sister-in-law." Bella gave her a shrewd look.

"Yes—in a way it is," she said, "and in a way—not. Lord Desmond is an attractive young man, my dear."

A faint flush stained the pallor of Pauline's cheeks:

"He is my friend," she said quietly, "and since you are so staunch a friend yourself, Bella, I feel you will appreciate that. Can you give me any further news of him?"

"He was to meet his father that night," Bella said in answer, "and unconsciously, perhaps, he was worried. He certainly looked ill and, I thought, unhappy. What an extraordinary thing it all was. Tell me about it. Remember, I am very behindhand with my knowledge of what has occurred."

Pauline's hands, lying in her lap, trembled, and she clasped them together till her great emerald

cut into her finger; but after a moment's silence she told Bella, as briefly as she could, the bare facts of the case, adding as she ended:

"My chief regret is that my brother's action was sudden and ill-judged. If he had not behaved so violently the whole thing might have been staved off, and Madge would never have followed Lord Desmond to Brighton. You can imagine the shock it has been to us all."

She had herself in hand again now, and was talking as composedly as though the matter had no particular interest to her, but Bella de Vauclin was far too astute to be so put off the scent—equally, she was clever enough to seem to be so, and Pauline was immensely relieved when she got up to leave, for, passionately as she desired to hear more about Desmond, she felt the strain of talking thus indifferently, and, knowing Bella's keenness of wit, she was afraid of betraying herself.

Meanwhile, Sir John Canning talked to Billy and Mrs. Cardew, who entered just after Madame de Vauclin had left, but his real interest was given to Pauline. She attracted him strongly, and it was evident to him that his mention of Lord Desmond Harbyn had disturbed her in some way. He wondered if there was a love affair between them—he knew Pauline to be a widow, but if so, it could hardly be a happy one, for there was tragedy rather than joy in her eyes when she asked after Lord Desmond, and the memory of that night



crossing to Calais was vividly present to his, Canning's, mind. Desmond Harbyn had surely touched bottom that night in his grief and despair.

His work had developed a passion for humanity in the great surgeon; he found the soul of his patients even more absorbing than their bodies; he knew he had unwittingly stumbled upon trouble.

He left without having any further opportunity of talking to her, and when he had gone Billy spoke with some heat.

"Pauline, what did you say Desmond Harbyn was a friend of yours for? I thought you had never met him before that damned matinee."

Pauline, who had picked up a magazine, went on looking idly through its pages.

"You are quite correct in thinking that," she said.

"Then how can he be a friend of yours—how—"

She heard the impatience in his voice, and a sudden intense disgust of all the pretence and secrecy took her; she longed to fling discretion aside and tell the truth of her love for Desmond, and the constant effort at concealment wearied and disheartened her. There was something of her feelings in her voice as she answered, and something that made Billy frown and look intently at her.

"Friendship is not reckoned by time, surely," she said. "Can we not discuss something—or somebody else?" Dicky, who had frankly declared that he considered Pauline the most fascin-

ating of her sex, came to the rescue with more valour than discretion.

"Shut up catechising Pauline!" he exclaimed, "Why can't she have any friends she chooses? Look here, Pauline, let's go for a walk! It's a heavenly evening, and stuffy indoors. We'll go in the park and then on to the cinema."

The interruption was welcome, and Pauline, rising hastily, went up to get ready, while Dicky, intensely proud of the success of his suggestion, awaited her in the hall.

They walked up to the Pavilion at the Marble Arch, obtained good seats, and saw some excellent films, and Pauline was glad of the distraction, and glad, too, of the company of her young brother. She found the exquisite Dicky a curiously attractive companion. He was young enough to be refreshing in his outlook upon the world of men and matters, he was enthusiastic, unconsciously egotistical with the egotism of extreme youth, candid, and rather touchingly devoted to herself. He asked no questions, and had the possibility of criticism with regard to her, entered his mind, he would have whole-heartedly endorsed any opinion she ventured to possess, or any course of action she decided upon.

For an hour or two she forgot her own affairs, and, when about nine o'clock, they emerged into the soft spring evening, she felt cheered and more her normal self.



They turned down Park Street, and Dicky, thrusting his arm into hers, gave it a sudden squeeze.

"I say, Pauline," he began. "Didn't you think that girl who played Estelle—Vera Howe, you know—didn't you think she was a corker?"

"She was charming, I thought," Pauline agreed cordially. "I've never seen her before."

"No, of course not. It's her first big part, and she was dreadfully nervous about it. I told her she'd get on all right, and so she has."

"You know her then?" Pauline enquired, and in the soft gloom she could only guess at the look on his face from the shy enthusiasm of his voice.

"Yes, I know her quite well. She lives in St. John's Wood. She—she's perfectly ripping."

"Is she? You're great friends then?"

"Yes, great. She—well—she's just the one girl in the world for me, Pauline! And I shall never care for anybody else."

"Oh, it's that way, is it?" Pauline said. "Dicky, how very exciting!"

He had evidently been more than half afraid of disapproval, for at her answer he squeezed her arm close and swallowed hard.

"Pauline, you're an angel—most sisters would have leapt down my throat! One's people always disapprove of the girl one wants to marry. I say, do let me tell you about her! I've been simply bursting to tell somebody, but mother would

merely smile, and Henrietta's so different to what she used to be now she's got in with all this sickening modern-art lot."

Pauline patted his arm; she was far too wise to check his confidences by any sign of disapproval or, worst insult of all, any reference to his youth; that she could safely leave to others, should the matter become in any way serious.

"Of course you can tell me; I'm extremely interested," she said. "She is certainly very clever, and very attractive. Let us walk slowly, then you will have time."

So Dicky began to pour forth the story of his love-affair, telling how he first met Miss Vera Howe, when a friend took him to a film rehearsal, how he had called on her at her home, a small house in Loudoun Road, St. John's Wood, how he found her to be the eldest of six children, with a pleasant mother, and a father who was a highly unsuccessful journalist, how anxious Vera was to make money so that she could help them at home, and how, last, but far from least, she was graciously pleased to allow Dicky to place his heart at her feet.

Pauline listened attentively, and came to the conclusion that, shorn of the angelic attributes with which Dicky invested her, Vera Howe was probably a nice girl and quite good for Dicky to fall in love with. Since, however, she wished to make quite sure, and since no one but herself knew



anything about the affair, she made the suggestion that, once and for all, sealed him her slave.

"You must bring her to have tea with me," she said. "We might go to a matinee, and have tea somewhere afterwards. How would this next week suit you both?"

"I say, Pauline," Dicky cried, "you really are a brick! D'you mean that? Well, why not Thursday? I'll write to her to-night. They're not on the 'phone, can't afford it, I fancy. It is ripping of you—absolutely top-hole!"

His delight was touching in its sincerity, and, giving confidence for confidence, Pauline told him something she had not yet mentioned to anyone else.

"Dicky, I want you to do something for me as well," she said, as they drew near the Rectory. "I want you to help me look for a flat or a little house. I want to get a place of my own as soon as I can."

"Of your own? You're not leaving the Rectory? Oh, I say, how rotten! Pauline, don't. I'd hate it without you now—just hate it."

His dismay and real distress were balm to Pauline's rather sore heart, but she had made her decision, and meant to stick to it.

"Yes, dear," she said, "I am leaving. It is better for me to have my own place. You see, after all, the Rectory is really Raven's house, and it is different for you others to be in it, because he is

your guardian, and mother, of course, would naturally live with him if you did. I am going to suggest that Billy and I share a small place somewhere quite near. And I am going to look out at once—so you'll help me, Dicky, won't you?"

"Of course I will. But it's really rather foul all the same. The only thing is"—he paused a moment, looked at her through the shadowing light, then added, rather doubtfully—"I could bring Vera to see you, I suppose."

"Of course!" Pauline answered promptly. "And I shall hope to be quite close, you know. And—Dicky, don't mention it to the others, will you? I'll tell Billy."

"Rather not. Hullo, there's Raven."

Raven's tall figure was just crossing the road in front of them, and Pauline's lips tightened at the sight of him; she found it hard to forgive him for his manner toward her, and she would have checked Dicky's whistle had she been able to do so. At the sound of it, however, Raven turned round, saw them, and stood back from the hall door to let Pauline pass, and, as she did so, she spoke indifferently.

"Good evening," and passed on as though she were speaking to a stranger.

He answered as formally, and she went straight up to her room without any further word, but aware that even that transitory glimpse of him had shown her how drawn and haggard his face was.



She felt oddly ill at ease with her conscience as she took off her outdoor things; he had had the look of a man physically and mentally exhausted, and the thought of that comfortless study chilled for her her own luxurious room, and refused to permit her to enjoy it. She told herself that he had plainly showed her he wished for no attention from her, that any enquiry as to his welfare would be treated by him as an intrusion, yet all the same she could not settle to reading or blot out the memory of his look from her mind.

Presently she spoke to Mrs. Cardew.

"I saw Raven just now," she said. "He looked very tired."

"Easter Day is tiring for a priest," Mrs. Cardew said, placidly, glancing up from her book. "But Raven is used to strain."

"Has he had any supper?" was Pauline's next question, and her mother shook her head.

"My dear, I never ask him any questions," she said. "You see, he lives his life quite apart from the rest of us, and I never interfere in his arrangements. I like him to feel quite free."

So Pauline relapsed into silence and turned her attention to her book as best she could.



CHAPTER XIV

A FORTNIGHT later, by the most unforeseen piece of good luck, Pauline secured the option of a house, through Eve Wilmot, who was a friend of the owner, a certain Mrs. Adams, who was returning unexpectedly to America.

It was in the very part of London in which she had intended to live, being in Westminster, in a narrow little old-world street just by the Abbey; and it was in some doubt that she started out one windy, wet afternoon, with Eve, to look at it; and Eve, who disliked the idea of her being out of May-fair, tried to discourage her.

"You'll simply hate being right away from everybody," she said, as the car sped down Whitehall, "and you'll get all the fogs off the river, and have endless sore throats and colds. It's so damp and low."

"I never have sore throats," Pauline rejoined, quite undisturbed by such a dismal prophecy. "And Westminster is on gravel, while most of London is on clay. If I like the house in Little Clock Street I shall take it."

So they drove on, and found themselves stopping before a little house of old brick, with white window-sills and a fine old Adams doorway.

It was a small house, severely plain as to archi-



ture, facing into Little Clock Street, built by Inigo Jones, and under the very shadow of the Abbey Towers, and directly Pauline entered, she knew she would take it.

The little entrance passage led into a small, square hall, from which led a dining-room, a library, and a little well-fitted cloakroom, all alike panelled and painted white—a white that had become mellowed to a hue of ivory. A staircase, shallow stepped and wide, led to the next floor, which possessed a delightful drawing-room with three windows—one looking over the Abbey garden, the other two into Little Clock Street. On the other side of the hall was a small study and another room, and above were the bedrooms.

It was charmingly furnished, there was a baby Bechstein grand piano, many books, one or two really fine pictures, and some beautiful old furniture. Mrs. Adams wished to sell house and contents, but Pauline wished only to rent it for six to twelve months, and eventually got her way, and left an hour later with the preliminaries settled, and the date of her arrival fixed.

“What made you refuse to buy or rent the house unfurnished?” Eve enquired, with some curiosity, as they drove home by way of the Embankment, for Eve to leave a note at the Hotel Cecil. “You told me that first afternoon that you were going to settle in England.”

She looked at Pauline as she asked the question.

and Pauline, gazing away over the swift grey river, did not answer immediately; when she did, her tone told Eve more than she knew.

"I'm not sure now," she said. "I think perhaps England will be too grey for me after all. So I don't want to commit myself."

Eve nodded. Something inexpressibly weary in Pauline's tone went to her heart; she was not demonstrative by nature, but now she suddenly stretched out her hand and gave Pauline's arm a quick little caressing pressure.

"I wish I could help you—both," she said, almost under her breath. "But that is beyond my power."

It was the first time she had referred to that strange scene in her house, nearly three months ago, and Pauline respected her discretion and kindness in not pressing for an explanation. Now, at Eve's words, her gaze left the river, and she turned her head and looked at her friend.

"You have been very loyal, Eve," she said; "very loyal and very kind. You have asked no questions, expected no enlightenment, and I owe you an explanation. I have always realised that, but even so I could not give it then. There is hardly one to give, even now. Desmond and I met too late. But for me there will never be another man in all the world. There is just that."

Her voice deepened to a lovely note of tenderness, and Eve looked helplessly at her.



"But Desmond—what of Desmond?" she asked. "If Madge is divorced, he must marry her."

"Yes, I realise that," Pauline said quietly. "So does he. But that need not—does not—alter our love."

"But Pauline, the tragedy of it? Why must it be? Why should you both be sacrificed to Madge? She is a heartless, selfish butterfly, she can never make Desmond happy, she does not love him. She does not love any one except herself! She's not capable of it, and you are! Oh, of course, I know it's tradition, and tradition is the most powerful factor in our lives. I know it must be, this wretched marriage, but I would do anything in the world to stop it!"

"There is nothing to do," Pauline answered. "Nothing, we must pay the price for our mistakes."

"It is the innocent suffering for the guilty," Eve cried, her usual indifferent manner utterly vanished. "Why should you pay for the sin of Madge and Desmond?"

"I pay for my own, too," Pauline said. "Oh, don't you understand, Eve? This particular sin may not be mine, but there are others for which I owe payment, others that need expiation. We all suffer and we all pay . . . I think sometimes if we shirk, we have to pay more. Do you remember that book of Bourget's, *Le Sens de la Mort*? And Le Gallic's belief that the use of suffering was

atonement? That life can have no meaning unless suffering and death have the significance of redemption? 'You will always find the Cross,' that was his belief . . . and it is mine."

"And yet," Eve said, curiously, regarding her with a searching gaze, "and yet you love God, believing that?"

Pauline looked out to the rain-washed world beyond the car windows, beyond the wet pavement and the drab houses, to the hurrying clouds; and her eyes grew very soft and luminous, and her mouth curved into a faint smile.

"Perhaps because of believing that," she said. "I think suffering is the surest way of all."

"And it is worth while?"

"Worth while?" Pauline's eyes left the grey clouds and came to Eve's face, and there was sudden laughter in their shadows. "Why, Eve, anything is worth while if through it we find God."

"You are religious, Pauline. I envy you your faith," Eve said. "I am not. I have no faith, and believing it necessary to suffer would make me a rebel, not a saint."

"Then perhaps you will not have suffering," was Pauline's answer. "I expect I needed it more than happiness . . . so it came. Am I talking priggishly, Eve? Forgive me."

"There never was, and there never could be, anything of the prig about you, Pauline!" Eve answered, with such enthusiasm that Pauline



smiled. "I would defy the whole world and every tradition ever held by civilisation if you and Desmond could marry."

The car had turned into Curzon Street, and Pauline said no more; but as she accompanied Eve up to the charming drawing-room, a pang shot through her, despite her brave words. Those words had voiced her belief, but belief did not make suffering any less easy, and her longing for Desmond's presence was accentuated by her visit to this house, where she had known the height and depth of joy and sorrow. It was with something of relief, therefore, that she found Easton there, making any further intimate conversation between Eve and herself impossible.

A few days later, the formalities regarding the house in Little Clock Street were concluded, and Pauline made the announcement of her plans to her family one evening at dinner, when Raven was present. Mrs. Cardew had been fore-warned, but none of the others, except Dicky, knew anything about it, and there was a general outbreak of questioning, till Raven put in his oar, and the others were silent.

"I had no idea you intended making your home elsewhere," he said. "Had you decided when you arrived in February?"

"No," Pauline said, "I had no intention then of making my home elsewhere."

She met his look across the table with level in-

different gaze, and something in that steady regard disturbed him. He asked no further questions, however, and the subject dropped till they were in the drawing-room afterwards. Then Mrs. Cardew began to ask some questions about the house itself, and Henrietta burst forth:

"Pauline, what in the world made you do it? You can't pretend you really want to live alone, surely? Isn't there another reason? Isn't there some——"

Pauline interrupted her.

"The reason is just that which I told you," she said. "I think it altogether more convenient for me to have my own home. I have always had it, you see, Henrietta, and I miss it."

"I call it a rotten idea," Henrietta retorted. "And I believe, some way or another, it's Raven's fault. He's enough to make anybody do anything—gloom and fasting, and all the rest of his absurd ways."

"My dear, my dear!" Mrs. Cardew said, gently, and her daughter elevated her scornful little nose.

"So they are! Raven is completely out of date with all modern thought. Every one knows the Church has got to go, that it's failed publicly, that it's behind the times and has no conception of modern needs. And he must know it as well as any one else."

"Henrietta!" For once Mrs. Cardew spoke quite sternly. "I will not permit such blasphemous



words in my presence. Modern young people have no reverence either for God or man."

Henrietta made a little grimace behind her mother's back, but subsided, and a moment later Toby came into the room.

Pauline had not seen him since the fatal night, and she was shocked to see how changed he was; his fair, rather boyish, good looks had faded, his eyes were sullen, his mouth harder. His greetings were brief, and in answer to his mother's gentle enquiries he spoke bluntly.

"I came to tell you that the case is fixed for the first week in June; probably the seventh."

Pauline controlled a start with difficulty. That meant that on the seventh Desmond would be back in England; and though she tried to remember what such a return implied, she could not check joy at the prospect of meeting him. For the moment it was enough that she should see him.

She heard, as from a distance, Mrs. Cardew's questions and Toby's replies, till something the latter said caught her attention more fully:

"Madge's solicitors have just informed mine of her intention to defend the case."

Henrietta's disgusted, "Then it will be in all the papers and the whole of the season will be ruined for us!" came sharply to her ears, and she roused herself from her thoughts and spoke:

"That means Madge—and Lord Desmond—in the witness-box, I suppose?" she said, half-startled,

half-shocked, to hear how indifferent her voice sounded. "Did you expect it, Toby?"

Toby looked across at her.

"No," he said, "naturally not. She hasn't a leg to stand on. She herself left word to say she'd gone to join Harbyn at Brighton . . . I expect he's put her up to it, damn him."

At those last angry words, Pauline pressed her hands together, but she spoke quietly:

"I am so sorry; I wish she had not decided to do anything so foolish."

"So will she before she's through," Toby said, with a short laugh. "Jerome will put her through it . . . and Harbyn, too."

Henrietta's mocking young voice cut across her brother's:

"And that's the result of a love-match!" she cried. "Do you wonder that I've no use for raptures? You should have seen Madge and Toby when they were engaged!"

Toby made an inarticulate sound, and quite suddenly a heat of anger at her young sister ran through Pauline.

"Mother is right," she said, and her tone made them all look at her. "You are a type, Henrietta, and you have neither reverence nor heart—yet. When you have learned what life means, when you have suffered, perhaps you will know better than to mock at the pain or the opinions of others. Good night."



In a dead silence, she crossed the room to Mrs. Cardew, and kissed her, looked at both Henrietta and Dicky, avoided Toby's eyes and went to the door. Just as she had her foot on the bottom step of the stairs, however, Toby came out of the drawing-room, closed the door behind him, and spoke her name:

"Pauline, just a moment."

She wanted to get away by herself, but something in his tone forbade her to show her desire, and she met his eyes with a quiet, "Yes, Toby?"

At her question he hesitated, swallowed, and then spoke rather thickly:

"That was . . . good of you," he said, "Henrietta thinks it amusing to watch the result of other people's mistakes."

Something in his manner emboldened Pauline to a sudden and utterly unpremeditated request. Putting out her hand, she laid it for a moment on her brother's.

"Toby," she said very gently. "Would it be possible, even now, for you to stop all this? To forgive Madge? To take her back? No—wait! It was only an instant's madness of temper, that flight of hers to—to Lord Desmond. Temper following on foolish and selfish flirting, no more, then."

Thunderstruck by the audacity of such a request, he stared at her in silence, and she went on hurriedly:

"You loved her, she loved you, Toby. It was one night's sin arising more from foolish temper and hurt pride than any inherent viciousness. Could you be generous enough, great enough, to forgive her, and take her away?"

For a moment he was speechless, then his words came slowly:

"One night! What do you mean? They have been together nearly three months. You must have very little knowledge of human nature, my dear Pauline, if you think one night exhausted their passion for one another."

The sneer in the last words told her she had lost what she had never really hoped to win, but even as she drew back he spoke more gently.

"Pauline . . . you have never interfered or given me advice and I am grateful, and sorry to refuse anything you ask, but it's impossible . . . quite impossible. You see . . . our love is dead . . . quite dead."

His voice stumbled suddenly, but his eyes were hard.

"I don't pretend to say it doesn't hurt . . . like hell!" he said. "But it's not love . . . I suppose it's pride . . . and I could never trust her again . . . we were all wrong for one another, it's best done with."

Pauline bent her head in assent.

"Forgive me then for my suggestion," she said. "Good night, Toby," and went on her way upstairs.



CHAPTER XV

THE boat-train came into Victoria exactly on time, and Pauline, seated in a corner of a closed taxi, watched for a glimpse of Desmond. She had received a letter telling her of the date of his arrival, and saying that he would come between tea and dinner to the house in Little Clock Street, but even so she could not be content, and, entirely unknown to him, she had driven to Victoria, and was now waiting on the chance of a moment's sight of him.

Once, in the crowd, she thought she saw him, then, quite suddenly, she caught sight of Eve Wilmot's car drawn up in line, and a fierce jealousy took possession of her. She knew whom he was longing to see, yet convention demanded that such meeting could only take place by stealth. She sat forward, careless whether any one saw her or not, and was rewarded by the sight of Eve's car just passing, and a glimpse of Desmond's grey-clad shoulder, and the back of his head a second later—any view of his face blotted out by Eve's wide-brimmed primrose-coloured hat. She felt the blood stand still at her heart, then race onward, and the hot crowded station seemed to sway dizzily about her; then, recovering herself, she put her head out of the window:

"Please open the taxi," she said, "and take me back to 7, Little Clock Street, Westminster."

The man grumbled at opening the car, and grumbled still more when Pauline told him to stop at the florist's just outside Victoria, where she bought an armful of roses, but Pauline, for once, was quite indifferent to any show of discourtesy, and when she was at last in her house she realised that the mere sight of Desmond had set her shaking all over.

She ordered tea, arranged the roses, and tried her utmost to settle to some occupation, but her nerves, for once, refused to obey her will, and she was feeling almost ill by the time a taxi pulled up in the street below.

She had been standing by the piano, but sank down on a chair, all the colour draining out of her face, saw the door open, and heard the maid's voice announcing:

"Lord Desmond Harbyn," and half rose to her feet to find her knees shaking and refusing to bear her.

As for Desmond, he did not see her waiting for him, and for one dread moment his world went black before him, then he saw her, as he had seen her in his dreams, saw her as he had ached and longed to see her, with arms outstretched and eyes shining and lustrous, and with a stifled, choking sound in his throat, he flung himself down beside her, crushing her mouth against his, sobbing her



name over and over again . . . "Pauline . . . Pauline . . . Pauline . . ."

When at last they became coherent, even to one another, Pauline's face was wet with tears, though her lips were trembling into smiles, and the pallor of her cheeks was tinged with rose; and, drawing back a little, she studied his face with yearning, tender gaze.

"Oh, my dear!" she said at last, hardly above her breath. "Is it you? Really you? I'm afraid to speak lest I shatter a dream!"

He nodded, unable to answer otherwise, and rested his head against her shoulder, and when at last he found words his voice was thick.

"It has been a life-time," he whispered, "Pauline, I can't do it . . . I can't do it. I can't live without you! Do you understand? I can't!"

A little shiver went through her, but she knew better than to enter into any protest then; instead, she bent her head so that her lips rested on his forehead, and tightened her hold of him so that, for the time, he forgot everything, but the fact of her living physical presence. Presently she spoke again: "Can you dine with me?" and at his eager acceptance pointed to her wrist.

"Twenty-five minutes past seven! I must leave you while I change, dearest. I shall be very quick."

He rose to his feet, looking taller than ever in the low room.

"Then I'll taxi to Eve's and change," he said. "I left my things there on purpose. We've the whole evening, haven't we? I'm not seeing my family till to-morrow."

She smiled at the question.

"As though I should have any engagement! Dinner is at eight. Hurry, dearest."

She would have rung, but he stopped her.

"No. Don't. I'll let myself out. I don't want to see anyone—even your maids—just now. Oh, Pauline, I'm afraid to leave you . . . afraid lest something should happen . . ." She made a little mocking gesture.

"To you, perhaps, in the form of a runaway taxi? Or do you think Estelle will poison me while you are changing? Oh, my dear one . . . go . . . no, don't kiss me again or I shall never let you go at all."

She watched him down the stairs, heard the hall door shut, then, going up to her bedroom, dropped down into a chair and wept.

Estelle's knocking at the door, her imperative demand to be let in, and the Abbey chimes telling the half hour, penetrated at last to Pauline's brain; calling to Estelle she snatched up a fresh handkerchief, went into the bathroom adjoining, and plunged her face into cold water.

Estelle, quick to scent a romance, as all her countrywomen are, instantly remembered the night when her mistress had come in at halfpast



ten, looking like death itself, not so many months ago; and now, after the visit of this extraordinarily-attractive English "milor," she was weeping with joy!

Estelle moved about the room getting everything ready, and in a few moments Pauline came in, after the speediest bath she had ever taken, and allowed herself to be dressed. She refused, however, to wear the black gown Estelle had put out for her, but chose, instead, one of gold brocade, severely simple of cut, and exquisite in colour for her dark hair and clear pallor.

She descended to the drawing-room just as the Abbey clock struck the hour and Desmond's taxi drew up in the quiet little street, and five minutes later they were facing each other across the small oval table, its polished surface reflecting the soft candle-light, and the gleam of Queen Anne silver and old English crystal, exchanging news of Paris and London, speaking of Pauline's find in this little seventeenth century house, and half a dozen other things, for all the world as though no overmastering passion held them both in its grip.

The unwritten tradition of a certain section of civilised society demands always and everywhere in the presence of others a certain poise, a certain control. That tradition, instilled from earliest days into the mind, may have its drawback and its limitations, but it also has a compensation in that it forms a habit of at least outward self-control in

the crises of life, that is second nature to most men and women, and, for the second time in their joint lives, that tradition stood Pauline and Desmond in good stead, safe-guarding them through that first dangerous hour when the joy of re-union sweeps away balance, and passion clamours to take its toll.

Both knew the tumult surging through each other's being, both realised the danger, and both entrenched themselves behind the law of their tradition in formal acceptance of the ordinary routine of little things, till insensibly the first move of fierce desire and—more dangerous still—exquisite tenderness, had subsided, and racing pulses were slowing down under the effort of habit and will.

Both purposely prolonged the dinner, chosen with Pauline's greatest skill, and cooked as only her Normandy Marie could cook it, and when at last the little green Worcester coffee cups were on the table, cigarettes alight, and the maids withdrawn, Pauline had herself sufficiently in hand to dare to be alone with the man she loved, and tell him in words something of what that love meant.

As for Desmond, the past months seemed a nightmare, and he sat watching Pauline, talking but little at first, but insensibly soothed by her very presence. Mutually they avoided any reference to the future; this hour was theirs, and theirs alone, not to be spoiled by thoughts or words of the suffering that lay ahead for each, and when at last they went up to the drawing-room they sat



down near the open windows and talked at first of each other, then of themselves, last of all, fell silent as the summer night darkened to sapphire overhead, and the stars came out like points of golden fire.

Then, Desmond, moving from his chair, came over to the little couch where Pauline sat, and dropped down beside her.

"Pauline," he said, and putting his arm about her drew her close, "Pauline . . . may I come here every day? Even when . . . when the whole horrible thing is going on?"

At the question she moved a little so that she could lay her cheek against his.

"Yes, dearest. Every day. I can see you so little in public, but here at least we can be together. I chose this house on purpose directly I saw it. It is central and yet remote. You can come when you are free . . . I shall be waiting."

Her answer, so heedless of thought for herself in its generous thought of him, sent a thrill of hot shame through him, and spurred by that shame he spoke.

"If I do that . . . your servants will gossip. People will make remarks. Oh, Pauline," his voice deepened suddenly and his hold on her tightened. "Help me not to be selfish! Help me to keep my love for you as great a thing as yours for me! I want you so . . . I ache so for your presence, for the mere sight of you, the sound of your voice

. . . the way you move and look . . . that I forget everything else in the desire to be near you. I forget the protection I owe you . . . to my shame. Pauline . . . help me."

He hid his face against her neck as he ceased speaking, and she was silent a moment before the humility of his words and tone, and after a moment he went on speaking with his face still hidden.

"I'm afraid of myself. I thought I could always be sure of myself . . . with you," he said, and his words came disjointedly as if he were trying to tell her what he found difficult to put into words. "But now I'm afraid . . . afraid of what I may ask. Pauline . . . do you understand? Can you understand . . . can you believe that I am fighting that side of myself with all my strength? And even then . . . can be terrified lest I should behave in such a way that you would despise me . . . oh, my dear . . . I'd give all my life . . . I'd suffer any punishment . . . if only I had a clean, straight record to offer you . . . if only I could wipe out the past and come to you . . . unstained. It's so easy to say . . . but it's the punishment of hell to feel. And it's only fair that I should feel it . . . but you feel it too, and that is where the punishment is doubled . . . Oh, Pauline . . . that old saying that one heard in childhood is true, true to the last letter . . . 'The way of transgressors is hard' . . . and I . . . I, who'd give my heart's blood to save you pain, have



brought more suffering into your life than any other living soul, and that's my hell, Pauline . . . whatever I may do . . . or say . . . in a moment of madness . . . don't heed it . . . try to forgive me . . . remember I'm paying . . . paying . . . oh, God! . . . and I shall pay . . . till the day I die . . . for the laws I have broken, and the sins I have committed . . .” High up in the shadowy violet dusk Big Ben struck his solemn notes, to be echoed, after a moment, by the more melodious chimes of the Abbey, and, as the air vibrated and quivered into silence, once again Pauline spoke.

Afterwards, lying in her bed, she wondered if she had said too much, then put the unworthy fear from her. To hold back, to dole out her love, to measure the gift she had to bestow, was contrary to everything in her nature. Desmond had withheld nothing from her—she could not be less generous. Yet, as she lay there, doubt more than once took possession of her mind, doubt of herself, not doubt of him; doubt lest she could trust herself to her own will if a crisis of more than ordinary danger should arise. They had parted quite early, for Desmond had not yet put in an appearance at home, with reluctance, but imperfectly concealed, and Desmond had left her standing in the centre of the shadowy drawing-room, hands pressed together till the great emerald cut into the tender flesh, lips set, eyes closed, lest the sight of his de-

parture should force her to speak the words that clamoured for utterance, the words that would sweep them both into the vortex.

And the difficulty of that parting had warned her, revealing, as it did, the strength of her own feelings. She had not guessed at the depths of her own nature till Desmond's passion awoke hers, and now she faced the danger that lay before her, and at which he little guessed, relying as he did so greatly on her strength to aid his.

As for Desmond, he walked back from Westminster like a man in a dream; half dazed by the storm in his blood, yet conscious of a mental relief, as though some terrific strain had just relaxed, leaving his brain partially stunned, yet already aware of its deliverance.

Near the Duke of York's steps he took a taxi home, and, as he stood on the doorstep of the Berkeley Square house, he found himself wondering a little what kind of a reception he would receive. Eve had told him that both his father and mother were in town, but she had had no idea as to their engagements for that evening, and he hoped devoutly that his mother was either entertaining or out. In either case, he could escape to his own rooms without attracting any attention, whereas if—his thoughts were abruptly ended by the doors being opened, and as he entered the house he had left so suddenly months before, he saw



Parker stepping forward more hurriedly than he usually moved.

In answer to his careless greeting, the old butler spoke anxiously:

"Her ladyship bade me say that she wishes to see your lordship immediately," he said; "directly your lordship arrived."

Desmond gave up hat and cloak, and glanced towards the stairs.

"Is her ladyship alone?" he asked.

"No, my lord," Parker's voice held a hint of apology; "Lady Henry is with her, and Miss Dorothy."

"Where's my brother?"

"I was to say that he would be in town to-morrow, my lord. He went down with his lordship two days ago to Rytheswood to settle about the sale."

"The sale?" Desmond stopped abruptly, and stared frowningly down at the old butler. "What d'you mean?"

The old man twisted his hands; it was evident that the news of the forthcoming sale of the Warwickshire property was unknown to this member of the family. When he had answered the imperative question, he went away more than a little disturbed, and Desmond, his brows knitted, went on upstairs to his mother's sitting-room, where she was awaiting him.

The room was at the back of the house, pleasant

grey-walled place with some really beautiful pictures and china; and as Desmond entered, he was suddenly reminded of his childhood and his love for these same pictures, for opposite, as he entered, was an easel, and on it a wonderful chalk head of himself when he was about ten years old, done by Sargeant.

It had always been a treasure of Lady Clere's, and the sight of it still there, in spite of all that had happened and was about to happen, touched Desmond, so that he was in a more softened mood as he closed the door and prepared to greet his mother. Lady Henry saw him first, and interrupted herself in the middle of a speech. Dorothy, badly-dressed as usual, saw him next, and flushed crimson; and Lady Clere, last of all, was aware of the tall, still figure, just within the room. With an exclamation of "Desmond! Is it you?" she rose and held out her hand, and as he took it, gave him a fluttering kiss on his cheek, and Lady Henry, without moving from her chair, said grimly:

"Good evening, Desmond. Dorothy, you may go to bed."

Dorothy, who was just about to speak to Desmond, turned in consternation.

"Bed? Oh, mother, mayn't I——"

"I said 'you may go to bed,' Dorothy!" was the inexorable reply, and Desmond, his mouth twitching to keep back a faintly ironical smile, went across to the door and opened it.



"We must have a talk some other time," he said, smiling down upon his flushed and flustered cousin, and received from her a shy yet affectionate glance that, like the unexpected sight of his portrait, rather touched him.

So he spoke quietly as he met his aunt's glance:

"How do you do, Aunt Clarissa? Parker told me you were here."

She surveyed him unsmilingly, her lips pursed in a way that spoke volumes.

"I consider your mother requires *some one* to assist her in the trial through which she is passing," she remarked. "May I ask if you—object?"

Sarcasm was an unwonted weapon of Lady Henry's, and Desmond judged the situation to be acute.

"I was under the belief that it was myself, not my mother, who was passing through a trial," he remarked, and Lady Henry's face grew, if possible, more disapproving than before.

"I should hardly have considered your return a time or a subject for flippancy," she rejoined. "You may not object to being in the witness-box, but it is conceivable that your family are disturbed at the prospect."

That momentary softness vanished; without deigning to answer, he turned to Lady Clere.

"I understand you wished to see me at once, mother," he said. "I am sorry it is so late."

It seemed that the hour was a fresh offence;

Lady Clere glanced nervously at her sister-in-law as she answered her son:

"Naturally I wished to see you. It is five months . . . and all this upset . . . I thought your train arrived about tea-time."

He did not sit down, and she did not ask him to, and at his silence she spoke irritably:

"Your manners leave something to be desired, Desmond. I asked you a question."

"I beg your pardon," he said gravely. "I did not understand it was a question. Yes, the train arrived about five."

Lady Henry glanced from nephew to sister-in-law and back again to nephew; she was almost trembling with indignation, and could not control a sharp:

"Yet you could leave your poor mother waiting all these hours for you! I imagine you enjoy hurting people who love you."

The shaft went home in a direction little intended, and Desmond winced; to Lady Henry's surprise he made no answer to her accusation, but going over to his mother laid a hand on her shoulder.

"I had . . . something of importance to do, mother," he said. "I am sorry for my delay, and if you are not too tired I am at your service now."

Lady Clere hesitated; she wanted to kiss her son, and assure him that it did not matter in the



least, but she also wanted to appease her sister-in-law; in the end she did neither, but dabbed her eyes with her pocket handkerchief, and rose to her feet.

"I *am* too tired to talk to you now," she said. "This miserable affair has taken all the strength out of me. I must go to bed and take some bromide. It's really very trying of you, Desmond, to be so inconsiderate. You might have known I should be waiting for you."

His lifelong experience of her would have told him just the reverse, and although the unconscious injustice of her attitude was common towards all her children, and quite equally a life-long thing, he was, nevertheless, a little hurt that at such a crisis of his life she could find no more to say than words of petulant vexation. It seemed quite obvious, however, that the unpleasant little episode had been in vain, so he went towards the door.

"Then I will not delay you any longer," he said formally. "Good night to you both."

But Lady Henry stopped him.

"Since the case comes on so soon," she said, "it is not unreasonable that we should wish to hear what you intend to do." Foiled in his determination to leave the matter as it stood, Desmond wheeled round, frowning, and rather white about the mouth.

"It appears to me that it is my mother and your-

self, Aunt Clarissa, who are unreasonable," he said rapidly. "I have already made my apologies for the delay, and have offered to listen to anything my mother says, and to discuss anything she wishes to discuss. She tells me it is too late, and she is too tired. Very well, then—why do you ask me to talk further?"

He was aware that he was speaking with scant courtesy, but his patience was exhausted; strung up as he was to the highest pitch of nervous and emotional tension, further goading was more than he could bear, and without waiting for Lady Henry to reply he went straight out of the room, shut the door as quietly as his over-wrought nerves could permit, and went up to his own room, swearing beneath his breath.

On an upper landing he met a maid, who glanced at him curiously as he passed—a new girl recently come to the house, who, like her companions, was agog with excitement over the thrilling scandal that he was about to provide.

She gained an impression of a tall, exceedingly handsome figure, white mask-like face, and blazing eyes; and Desmond never saw her at all, but strode past, so absorbed in his own passionate resentment, that he had no thoughts to spare for any one in his path. So it came about that, as he passed down a short passage on the way to his room, he did not see a door standing ajar, or a figure, in an unbe-



coming, purple dressing-gown, slip out of the room and come towards him, till a hand just touched his arm, and a timid voice said:

"Cousin Desmond—I——"

He halted then, stared, frowned more than ever, then recognised Dorothy, with her hair in two thin plaits, looking, however—in spite of her dressing-gown—rather less abject than usual.

"You?" he said. "Why—what is it? Did you want anything?" She flushed at the surprise in his voice, but held her ground.

"No—that is—yes, I did!" she stammered. "I—just wanted to tell you how sorry I am—to just say I—I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do to help make things better for you."

If his dog had suddenly found speech, Desmond would not have been much more amazed, and for a moment he just stood looking down at her till he saw her pale blue eyes suddenly fill with tears, and her wide mouth tremble. Then, realising what an effort she must have made to overcome her shyness, he realised, too, the sympathy with a culprit, that prompted it, and the frown faded from his face.

"Why, Dorothy, that's very kind of you," he said. "Very kind. But you mustn't trouble your head about me. I'm all right." To his amazement Dorothy began to cry, and her plainness thus accentuated made Desmond suddenly pitiful.

"What's the matter, my dear?" he asked, bending down to her. "What's wrong? Here—take my handkerchief."

Desperately trying to gulp back her tears, Dorothy buried her face in the fine lawn.

"I—that's just it—I've nobody to trouble about——" she gasped at last. "And—and they were so horrid to you—I couldn't bear it?"

Here was an unexpected turn of affairs, Desmond was for the moment taken aback; then, very gently, he took her hands from her face.

"Dorothy, have you been fretting for my troubles? I little guessed it. Don't cry . . . and I'm grateful . . . it was sweet of you to care. Tomorrow, if they'll let me——" he laughed under his breath, his bitterness for the moment gone. "I must make you forget it all. Now, good night, dear—and sleep well." He bent down again and kissed her cheek, the kiss he would have given to a child of six; but when he had gently pushed her inside her room, it was not a child who stood there with flushed cheeks and heaving breast, but a girl transformed into womanhood, and transfigured for the moment almost into beauty by the careless caress of the man she adored.



CHAPTER XVI

DESMOND breakfasted in his own room the next morning, and wished Easton were at home to divert some of the attention from himself; but Easton was away with Lord Clere, and Desmond found himself in the unenviable position of the only member of the family at home.

He was careful to send a message to his mother to ask if she wished to see him; but a reply came back that she was resting till midday, and would prefer not to be disturbed, so he found himself at liberty. His first impulse was to go straight to Little Clock Street, but since he had several matters to attend to, he decided he would wait till luncheon, when Pauline was to meet him at a quiet little Soho restaurant. So he made an appointment or two, and then took a taxi to his solicitor's offices, in New Square, where he was ushered into a big, brown-panelled room almost lined with deed-boxes, looking on to the Square gardens, and welcomed by a frail, little elderly man, with clean-cut, ivory-hued features and keen, blue eyes—William Macdonald, the senior partner of Macdonald & Eyre, the family solicitors of Clere, and several other great estates.

Mr. Macdonald—very human and kindly under a formal exterior—had always had a secret liking for Desmond; perhaps, because he divined the unusual powers for either great good or great evil latent within this second son of a family with no particular reputation for either—honourable and clean-living as it was. And Desmond had always returned the liking, and now sat back in a big, leather arm-chair, and surveyed his own slim shoe.

"I received your letter saying you wished to see me," he said. "And I left France immediately. It sounded urgent. What's its reason?"

Mr. Macdonald looked over his glasses, and stroked a finger-tip up and down with the edge of a silver penholder.

"Yes . . . it was important that I saw you immediately," he said. "Yes, yes, Lord Desmond. I fear I've rather tiresome news for you. Mrs. Cardew has instructed her solicitors to prepare a defence. They inform me she is going to defend the action brought by her husband."

Desmond dropped the stick with which he had been idly playing, and sat upright.

"What's that?" he said sharply. "Defend the action? *What?*"

"That is so. She is going to defend the action. Her solicitors have just communicated with me to that effect." Desmond made no answer; but, as he stared at the little man opposite to him, his brain was busy, for into it had leaped the first,



wild gleam of hope since that dreadful night journey to Paris. If Madge won her case he would be free—free to marry Pauline. His blood raced through his veins and pounded in his ears as the realisation came to him; then, with a shock so violent that it was actual physical pain, the hope died, for Mr. Macdonald was speaking in his quiet, precise tones.

"I cannot understand Mrs. Cardew's motive. In my opinion she has not the remotest chance of success. Not the remotest." And, after that violent racing, Desmond felt as though every drop of blood in his body froze into stillness as the realisation of his momentary folly gripped him.

In a voice he hardly recognised as his own, he spoke:

"That means I shall be in the witness-box," he said. "But it's absurd. Cardew knows the facts of the case . . . She knows them. Why, all Cardew's family know we were together that night at Brighton."

"Apparently, Mrs. Cardew bases her defence on some plea that you were in the same hotel by chance. I consider it amazing, but apparently she has something that she considers proof, which I have not yet heard. I am going round to Messrs. Tighe this morning to discuss the matter with them. You will require counsel, and I suggest Valcroge. He is one of the younger men, but he is remarkably clever."

"When can I see him?" Desmond asked; and Mr. Macdonald picked up the telephone and made an appointment for the two men to meet early that afternoon, and Desmond left New Square, walking rapidly as he considered this new aspect.

By the time he reached the Strand he had determined to telephone Madge at once; but Madge was out, and he could only leave word with her maid that he would call at half-past four, when he understood she would be in. Then, thinking of Pauline, he suddenly felt that he could not see her till he knew more of this change of matters; he must know what his position was before they met or he would be no fit company for her; and, going into the nearest telephone box, he rang up 18, Little Clock Street, and was answered by Pauline in person.

"Yes? Ah, Desmond—it is Pauline speaking."

In spite of his state of mind he smiled as he heard her dear voice, and his own trembled a little as he answered.

"I know, my darling . . . bless you. Pauline . . . I cannot lunch with you. Something has happened with regard to the case, and I have to be at Macdonald's offices again at three o'clock. I want to know more about it before I see you, so may I come in as usual, about seven? D'you understand, Pauline?" There was a moment's silence, then her voice came again, clear and encouraging.



"Yes, dear. You feel too unsettled . . . is that it? Of course you may come at seven."

"You're not annoyed?"

"Annoyed? . . . With you?" He heard a little ripple of laughter.

"Dearest, I'm not a foolish girl. Good luck to you to-day. I shall probably try to mend some of my broken engagements and lunch out, but at seven I shall be waiting. Good-bye."

Desmond hung up the receiver, turned out of the office; and a few minutes later, just as he was passing Charing Cross, he heard his name, and wheeled round to see Dane, whom he had last met on Victoria platform when he was leaving for France, with Madge.

He was not particularly pleased, but Dane greeted him warmly, suggested lunch, and would take no denial, so they turned back to the Savoy, and sat down at a table near the window, where, to Desmond's extreme annoyance, they seemed to be the centre of attraction.

There was an empty table close by, and soon after they had started luncheon the head waiter came to lay a big spray of pink roses on the cloth, and a moment later Dane broke off a remark about the Derby favourite to start violently and utter a smothered:

"Well, I'm damned!"

Desmond, not too attentive, just at present, to his surroundings, heard the vexation in the tone

and looked up to see Madge Cardew, a friend of hers, Mrs. Forbes, and two men, whom he did not know, coming across to the empty table.

Dane, seeing he had observed the newcomers, looked at him curiously. He was very white, and he sat rigid and still, but there was a set to his jaw and mouth, and a hard glitter in his eyes that Dane designated to himself as "darned nasty."

Madge, exquisitely dressed as usual, saw him just before she took her seat and flinched for a second, then she seemed to make up her mind, and coming across to him she held out her hand.

"Why, Desmond, how surprising! I didn't know you were in England."

Her attitude was superb; she was completely at her ease, utterly unconcerned with those around her, who might, to say the least, make uncharitable remarks about this meeting; and Desmond, unwillingly admiring, could do no less than stand for a minute or two talking to her.

"I telephoned you a short while ago," he said. "May I call this afternoon? There is something I want to talk to you about."

She picked up the roses and smelt them, then glanced up at him, with malicious laughter in her eyes.

"Most certainly! I imagined you would wish to see me. About four or four-thirty? I shall expect you then. How are your people?"

She kept him a little while longer, then dismissed



him by a gesture, and sat at her own table, leaving Desmond to realise that a good many curious eyes had been watching their every expression.

He made an excuse and left as soon as he could, went back to New Square, saw his counsel, and at a quarter-past four rang the bell at Madge's flat in New Cavendish Street, and was shown into her very charming, peacock drawing-room.

She was waiting for him, curled up in a corner of an immense couch drawn near the window and piled with cushions, and at his entrance held out her hand, and smiled lazily.

"My dear, how pleasant to see you again! But what a wreck you look!"

No man likes to be told by an attractive woman that he looks a wreck, and Desmond's reception of the remark was none too polite.

"I came here to ask you some questions," he said. "Not to discuss my looks."

He regretted the discourtesy of the words almost before they were spoken, and before she could reply, spoke again.

"I beg your pardon, Madge. I'm on edge. Forgive me." She looked at him curiously for a minute, then pointed to a chair close by.

"Sit there . . . we must have some tea. Oh, yes. Please ring that bell. I told them not to bring tea till I rang. Surely you can accept tea—even from *my* hands?"

The tone was half-taunting, half-amused; Des-

mond felt he was behaving like a foolish boy, and made no further remonstrance; and while they had tea, talked of indifferent matters, till Madge herself gave the lead.

"I suppose you want to ask me the reason of my decision to defend the case," she said. "Well—I can't answer you—or I won't. I have changed my mind. That is all."

He knocked the ash of his cigarette into his saucer, surveying it intently.

"What grounds have you?" he asked. "No counsel would let you put yourself in such a hopeless position if they knew the truth."

"Indeed?" Madge's airy tone should have warned him. "But perhaps I know what I am talking about, my dear. *After all*, we were at Folkestone together in the same hotel, but what does that prove? If you will think a moment you will remember that in public you were obviously both amazed and annoyed to see me when I arrived. You gave me some dinner, with a very bad grace . . . Estelle knows that, knows that we parted for the night with something almost approaching a quarrel. And as for Paris! . . . well, our stories, with regard to Paris, agree; do they not? I have decided to defend, and that must be sufficient for you." He looked at her frowningly intent.

"But your object in defending . . . What is



it?" he asked. "You don't care for Toby, and you don't care for the scandal. You told me so that day at Folkestone. I do not understand."

"No? Then I should advise you to think very carefully. If you do, I believe enlightenment will come to you. Please give me a cigarette."

He handed his case over to her, held the match, then rose to his feet, and began pacing up and down the room, Madge watching him with a gleam in her eyes. Presently, she spoke again.

"When you've quite done prowling about with that panther-like stride of yours, perhaps you'll listen to me when I ask you a question in your turn," she said. "What do you intend to do after the case is heard?"

He halted, and stared at her.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Just what I say. Surely I am entitled to a little of your confidence? It is within the bounds of possibility that we shall shortly be man and wife—dear me, how ecclesiastical that sounds!—and that being the case, I really should like to know something of your ideas for the future. No. I'm serious for once." He saw that, and was faced by this inability to answer; luckily, a memory of her own words, spoken on that wretched Sunday, flashed into his mind.

"Go abroad for a time till the scandal has blown over," he said briefly. "Then—as you once re-

minded me, your wealth and my name will rehabilitate us in our own world. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go."

She was silent a moment, then suddenly sprang to her feet, eyes and cheeks aflame.

"Oh, yes, go! Go at once!" she flashed. "Don't waste a second of your time on me . . . now. It's not worth it, because you'll have to soon. *Have* to. Do you understand? You don't even take the trouble to *pretend* to care now—you don't even trouble to be ordinarily polite. You simply desire to see as little of me as possible . . . well, I've agreed. I've made no trouble. I've let you go. But I've seen . . . and I know why. *I know why*. Do you understand?"

She broke off, panting a little, eyes blazing defiance at him, looking, in her sudden outburst of wounded vanity, like a lovely furious child; and Desmond stood for a moment too surprised to answer. His silence seemed to recall her to herself, and she laughed.

"If you could see yourself trying to pose as an injured hero!" she mocked. "Really, Desmond, you are most entertaining. At least, I shall not be bored when I am your wife. I shall always have you to look at!"

He made a gesture as if to silence her; made, too, as if to speak, then thought better of it, and went to the door. She watched him till he was



drawing it to, after him, then spoke his name, her tone sharp and urgent.

"Desmond! Wait!"

He obeyed; then, as she said no more, closed the door and came back to where she stood. He felt tired and sickened, and fully ashamed of the contemptible part he had played in this wholly wretched affair; and felt, too, that he did not care very much what she said to him.

Meanwhile, Madge had dropped into a corner of a sofa, and was gazing out of the window; aware of his patient waiting, she spoke, without looking at him.

"It's a pity, don't you think," she said slowly. "To show your distaste for me quite so openly? It does not reflect to my credit—or yours. And as in all probability we shall have to see a good deal of one another, I suggest that you change your behaviour—publicly, at least. After all"—her eyes left the outer world and met his—"You are the cause of my present position."

There was a moment's deadly silence in the room; Madge's quick breathing was distinctly audible, and a slow, dull flush mounted to Desmond's face.

For a moment he felt utterly incapable of replying, and when he forced himself to speak, the words came thickly.

"I know . . . to my shame."

The answer was very different to what Madge had expected, and in her turn she flushed.

"That was unfair of me," she said, speaking rapidly. "I am sorry. But the fact of the real issue remains. Please think over what I said, for your own sake as well as mine. And now, you must go . . . I'm expecting some friends."

He went out of the house into the hot streets, and walked towards Oxford Circus, unaware that he passed Billy and Raven Cardew, unaware of anything save his own tormented thoughts. Half-way down Regent Street he met two people he knew—a Mrs. Dysart and her younger sister, Olive Strange, both very much members of the smart, young married set, to which Madge—and, in a lesser degree, Eve—belonged. He would have walked by but for their stopping him, by name; and their greeting was not the most tactful, for Diana Dysart looked him up and down, and laughed.

"You don't look like the radiant lover who has defied the world!" she said. "Hasn't the lady been kind—or is there some one later?"

She had been too intimate with Madge for Desmond to be able to pretend he did not understand what she meant, and although the bad taste of the question infuriated him, he was, nevertheless, obliged to reply with more or less courtesy; but the meeting served to remind him how he was being



watched, and how fatally easy it would be to compromise Pauline.

That night, when he arrived at the house in Little Clock Street, he found Pauline waiting for him, in evident anxiety; and when the first rapture of their greeting was over, she told him what she had just learned from Billy, who had had tea with her.

"Toby is very upset, I hear," she said. "He can hardly believe Madge intends, even now, to defend. Yet, struggling with his anger and misery is, so Billy says, a faint hope; that after all, he is mistaken altogether about—her."

Desmond nodded; he was sitting back in a big chair near the open window, and Pauline, just opposite, sat where the last gleams of daylight touched the night blackness of her hair and eyes, and showed up the delicate pallor of her skin—startlingly white, in the soft shadow of the room.

Everything was very quiet. The hum of the Westminster traffic was too distant to be noticeable, the street was deserted, the night still, and intensely hot. To Pauline there seemed a menace in the atmosphere, as of storm or danger; she feared lest her curious uneasiness should communicate itself to Desmond, and tried hard to overcome what she felt to be nothing more than the strain of her nerves.

Her brother's news had shown her only too

clearly, what lay ahead of Desmond, and knowing him as she did, she knew, too, what he would suffer.

Presently he spoke.

"Pauline—what is your opinion about this? Your theory? Why has Madge decided to take this course? Is anything worth the publicity of cross-examination?"

Pauline was glad of the dusk in the room, for she shrank in every fibre from discussing the matter! yet realising his need for speech, forced herself to hide her sick distaste.

"I think it is because she knows that not only do you not love her, but that you love some one else," she said.

He uttered a startled exclamation, and sat upright, every nerve and muscle taut, staring at Pauline through the gathering twilight, his mind rapidly considering her words. He realised, suddenly, the meaning of Madge's veiled hints, of her acquiescence in his behaviour, of her temper in dealing with him, and the form of her revenge amazed him. He could hardly believe that she was willing to undergo so much in order to mete out his punishment, yet there was no other possible explanation. Leaning forward, he stretched out his hand to Pauline, and instantly responding she clasped it close.

"If that's the case I must stop coming here," he said. "If I don't—I run the risk of getting your name mixed up in the business—I harm you . . .



and I've harmed you enough." She was silent for a minute, realising the truth of what he said, and he spoke again with a new note in his voice.

"Pauline, I've been a weak fool. Help me to stand on my own feet and stop whining for help."

She smiled, and gave his fingers a quick, sudden pressure.

"My dear, you're asking me to forego one of my most valued privileges!" she said, with a little smile. "Don't you know a woman longs to feel the man she loves needs her help?"

He rose, drawing her to her feet and holding her close to him.

"I know," he said, and smiled in his turn. "And I always do need you, and always shall. There is no one else in the whole world for me—but just because of that, because your presence is such heaven to me, I must stop coming like this—every night. I'm leaning on you too much—demanding your strength instead of fighting to gain strength of my own. And it's not right. I'm thinking of myself—my own needs—and I ought—I *must*—be thinking of you. Pauline, dearest, say you understand. Don't you see what I mean?"

Fingering the rever of his dinner-jacket she glanced up at him, and then down once more as if she found the black silk in some way interesting. She knew he was right, but the stolen intimacy, the certainty of the hours together at the end of the tormented days had been very precious, and

her heart ached to think it must all cease; yet, she realised that for his own good and his future it was necessary for him to rely less upon the comfort of her presence and more upon his own effort of will. Yet, a voluntary cessation of these cherished hours cut deeply; her under-lip began to tremble, and she took it fiercely between her teeth. She had already learned how dangerous the tears of a woman, who is not given to weeping, can be to the self-control of a man who loves her; and she dared trust neither herself nor him should passion, fired by tenderness, gain the upper hand. So she forced back the desire to give way, and after a minute or two looked steadily up at him.

"Yes, dear, I understand," she said. "And you're right. I'm weakening you, and that mustn't be. You shall come one evening a week and dine with me. And for the rest—when you must."

So they made their bond and honestly intended to keep it, and Desmond went home through the hot, sullen night very determined to be worthy of her belief in him.



CHAPTER XVII

THE day before that fixed for the case, Easton came back to town, and dined with his brother at the former's club, very full of a long hoped-for change in his own future, and far too really sympathetic with Desmond to utter one word of open sympathy.

He had fretted and fumed over his inability to continue with his regiment, owing to the loss of his arm, and sundry other injuries; but now that his general health had improved, and his shattered shoulder healed sufficiently to permit a false arm to be of some service he had succeeded, by pulling enough strings, in gaining his end—an appointment in some remaining sphere of action.

"I am to get out to Enzruli as soon as possible," he said, as they ate their very excellent dinner. "It's to be—officially—a purely peaceful and political mission, but if it doesn't see some fighting, I'm a Dutchman. Anyhow, I'm off by the next boat that sails, and that is next Tuesday."

Desmond set his wine-glass down, and spoke sharply.

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes. Isn't it luck? Isn't it the finest, possible luck? Wish me joy, dear fella! You know what it means more than anybody else."

"Yes," Desmond said slowly. "I know—and I do wish you joy with all my heart."

He wondered if his voice sounded as dull as he felt; wondered, too, at himself. He had hardly realised, till it was to be so rudely taken from him, his pleasure in his brother's companionship—and Easton seemed to have forgotten all the sordid days ahead, seemed to heed nothing of the deep waters through which he, Desmond, must pass. Hurt, and therefore sullen, he made no further comment; and Easton, appearing to notice nothing, talked on about the little mission that was to cross through Persia to the Caspian, evidently quite content to be listened to.

The evening passed slowly; when it was no longer possible to linger over coffee and cigars, Easton suggested a revue, and they went on to the Aldwych and sat in a box, listening to quite charming, light music, and seeing some exceedingly attractive girls, clad in impossible clothes, dancing on a palm-shaded beach of an equally impossible island.

Desmond hardly spoke. He longed, passionately, for the quiet drawing-room of the house in Little Clock Street, and grudged the evening to any one but Pauline. Moving restlessly, he glanced down at the stalls during an interval, and saw Pauline herself seated between Billy and a tall, grey-haired man, whom he suddenly recognised as Sir John Canning.



Pauline was looking up at the great doctor, smiling over something, and talking animatedly; and a sudden gust of furious jealousy shook Desmond . . . not born of distrust, but born of hungry longing. He did not hear Easton speak to him; he was hardly conscious that he shook his hand. All he knew was that Pauline, whom he had fancied sitting alone in her drawing-room, thinking of him, was here at the theatre with another man, and seemingly quite content. Heedless of anything but this astounding fact, he went straight down to the stalls, and was half-way down the centre gangway before he realised the impossibility of his action, and from the box above Easton saw him stop and turn abruptly, and disappear through the doorway.

Thinking Madge must be present, he scanned the stalls and came suddenly upon Pauline de Fleurian, and a sudden suspicion flashed into his mind. When Desmond re-entered the box, he spoke casually.

"Wasn't that Madame de Fleurian? Awkward if we run into her brother afterwards. I know the other chap—a doctor. Deuced clever, too. I say, this is a rotten show. Shall we clear out?"

Desmond acquiesced only too willingly; he was actually trembling with the passion that was surging through him, and not till they were in the darkness of a taxi, jolting towards Berkeley Square, did he regain something of his customary manner.

Even then it was Easton who spoke first, and his words were unexpected, for he suddenly laid a hand over his brother's, and spoke quietly.

"Desmond, I'm damned sorry I'm going before this affair of yours. I'd have given a good deal to see it through with you, but now I've got the appointment I've no choice. But I hope things will go as right as they can, and I hope—somehow or other—happiness will come to you out of it."

The actual morning of the case dawned in a mist of heat, and even at ten o'clock the air was oppressive and the sky a brazen dome above the breathless city. Mrs. Cardew, who had been fretting more than any one guessed about the divorce, telephoned Pauline just after breakfast and begged her to come to the Rectory for a few days, but this Pauline felt to be the one thing she could not bear, and, as gently as she could she refused the invitation, saying she would come in about five, but must sleep at her own home.

Billy, and Pauline, as inconspicuous as her pallor and wonderful eyes ever permitted her to be, drove to the Law Courts together. She felt that if she lived to be a hundred she would never forget the vault-like smell of the stone, or the atmosphere both physical and mental, of the long passages and bewildering stairways, or the faces of the people she saw loitering about.

Presently, their family solicitor, Mr. Hanwell, arrived, with a clerk; a barrister came out of a



room marked IVA, and was introduced to Pauline as her brother's counsel; then the heavy swing door was pushed back, and they entered.

Already the court seemed crowded, and Pauline felt, rather than saw, the curious glances that greeted their entrance, and knew that every available corner of the place was filled with friends and acquaintances of both Madge, Toby, and the Harbyns.

She caught a glimpse of Lord Clere, his fine head, with its iron-grey hair and beard, making him at once noticeable; met Eve's piteous glance from the end of the same seat, and saw Peter Wilmot's ugly, kindly face close by.

There were many others—friends, acquaintances, sight-seers—and in almost every one, save the actual members of the two families, she sensed the same ugly, eager curiosity, hardly hidden with decency, the desire for enlightenment on hidden things, the vulgar wish for scandalous details.

There was a loud buzz of conversation, the noise of barristers and clerks walking about, the bang of doors, once a laugh of a leading K.C. recounting some story to one of his fellows. Then, suddenly, the clerk of the court came in; there was a general hush, the quick rustle and shuffle as every one rose to their feet, and the judge entered.

He was President of the Divorce Court, a short man with a clean-cut face and piercing, blue eyes; stern when he encountered deceit, merciful when

he dealt with youth and ignorance. Pauline found herself watching him with a sense almost of hypnotism from which the sound of a voice close by roused her with a jerk—her brother's counsel, Jerome, a big, heavily-built man, with a magnificent forehead and close-lipped, hard mouth.

Desmond was not in court; that, Pauline felt rather than saw; but before Jerome had finished his opening speech he came in, and moving so quietly that even she did not hear him, sat down in the vacant place on the front bench, next to his father. He was wearing rather light grey, and was, if possible, even more immaculately dressed than usual, as if in a spirit of deviltry he had defied his world's judgment; and Pauline shut her grieved eyes and waited, trying not to hear Jerome's powerful, even voice, trying to keep her mind clear of everything but her love and her ardent prayers for her lover.

Hours afterwards, when the heat in the close court had become almost unbearable, when the atmosphere was not only vitiated by the crowd of human beings, but poisoned by the questions and counter-questions and miserable, detailed suggestions of sin and deceit, Pauline wondered how she could bear her position much longer.

She wondered if she were utterly callous to be able to hear what she heard and yet remain loyal and deeply loving to the man whose sin had brought about all this misery; yet not for one



second did that loyalty or love falter. She heard her brother's passionate accusations, and the evidence of friends and servants, with no doubt in her heart, yet she suffered as she had never suffered before. She had known only too well what Madge's defence must mean, and thought she had steeled herself to bear it; but the reality was infinitely worse than the anticipation, and when, on the second day, Madge was in the witness-box under the fire of Jerome's cross-examination, she felt she could not endure much more.

She had not seen Desmond for three days, but she knew that to-day would see him cross-examined, and she dreaded with a sick dread the details she must hear. A delay, however, was caused by the lateness of arrival of a witness from the seaside hotel, and, as the afternoon dragged on, she began to hope that he would not appear that day—and Fate was kind. The Court rose and there was another night's respite before Desmond's turn on the rack should come.

To make matters worse Toby, utterly regardless of anything but his own ends had summoned Raven as a witness; and for the first time for weeks Pauline felt concern for another human being beside her lover, for Raven's set grim face and the ashen look of his skin revealed to her the torment such an ordeal was to him as priest even more than brother.

Yet she only spoke to him briefly, as to a mere

acquaintance, as she left the Court, and would have got straight into a taxi had not Dicky seized her by the arm, exclaiming loudly:

"Give me a lift as far as Trafalgar Square, Pauline—and Raven, too. Come on, Raven."

Pauline could do nothing but assent, and Raven got in the taxi and sat down beside her, while Dicky uttered a disgusted:

"Look at that! Oh, what a rotten, filthy business it all is!" and waved a hand in the direction of a row of placards of the evening papers, with headlines on every placard bearing similar news.

"Society divorce case. Startling details. Marquis's son as co-respondent. Well-known hostess' evidence. Famous preacher gives evidence . . . A west-end vicar in the witness box, etc."

One after another the vulgar miserable headlines stood out in startling relief, and Pauline suddenly caught her breath in a sound that was very nearly a sob, and, leaning back, closed her eyes.

"Dicky—don't!" she said just above her breath, and Dicky, who had been reading the words in low, disgusted tones, turned and stared at her.

"I didn't know you were so fond of Madge as all that!" he said, curiously. "As for Raven—well at least it's a change from his usual life, isn't it, old thing?"

Raven looked at his sister, then at Dicky.

"I could dispense with such changes," he said.



"Pauline, why do you not stay away? It's a horrible atmosphere in every way, and you looked exhausted."

There was real, if formal, concern in his voice, but Pauline's hurt at his former treatment was too bitter and too deep to be really forgotten. Opening her eyes, she looked out of the window into the glare of the dusty streets.

"I agree as to the atmosphere," she said, quietly. "But I prefer to be present to reading the accounts in the newspapers." Raven made no further remark and, at Trafalgar Square, he and Dicky alighted, Pauline driving on to Little Clock Street, where she went straight upstairs to bathe and change.

CHAPTER XVIII

AND during this stay of yours in Paris—nearly three months, I believe—you say that you did not once make love to Mrs. Cardew?”

“I do.”

“Not once? Yet you left England with her immediately upon her leaving her husband? Oh, come, Lord Desmond! I really feel you are asking us to believe too much.”

The suave voice, with its faintly mocking inflection, ceased suggestively; its owner glanced at his colleagues, and then at the scarlet-robed judge, the hint of a smile appearing round his thin lips, and the silence in the Court was for the moment marked enough to be dramatic. In the witness-box, his head high, every line of face and figure expressing a complete and haughty indifference, stood Desmond, by no means favourably impressing either the jury or counsel. He had already stood there for twenty minutes under the raking fire of Jerome’s cross-examination, and the atmosphere of the Court was tense with excitement and curiosity.

Amidst the crowded benches were many members of his own world, and one and all listened in—



tently to the famous barrister's questions and Desmond's brief answers. He seemed entirely careless of any impression he made, and his own counsel swore under his breath at his attitude. He was antagonising everybody with that hardly perceptible air of well-bred insolence—an insolence too undefined to be checked, yet assuredly there in his very poise and expression.

Pauline was nearly at the back of the Court, exhausted by the strain, yet indomitable in her determination to see the whole thing through, and beside her sat Eve Wilmot; while Pauline was whiter even than usual, Eve flushed and paled by turns at some of the questions asked and answered.

Quite suddenly Jerome seemed to lose interest in both case and witness; he turned over some papers, spoke in a whisper to counsel next to him, took his eyes off Desmond, made a few rather dilatory enquiries, and seemed to be on the verge of closing his cross-examination. The crowd, for the most part, strangers—relaxed, there was an audible stir and murmur, instantly checked by the usher, but the be-wigged barristers and habitués of the Court grew more alert, and fixed an eager gaze on Jerome's impassive face. His method was famous in the legal world, and that sudden, uninterested manner was inevitably the prelude to a most searching attack. And so Desmond found it, for suddenly Jerome's whole form stiffened, his

eyes blazed, and his voice rang out in words that were a statement rather than a question.

"Then, if that is so, you are the lover of another woman, and Mrs. Cardew has not only been seduced by you from her duty as a wife, but, by you again, has been most heartlessly deserted."

Even Desmond's cool composure was not quite proof against so unexpected an attack; his tall figure stiffened, he drew a quick breath, and his face was a sudden white mask of anger, and, before he could reply, his counsel jumped up.

"My lord, I protest against this question being put to——"

The President interrupted the indignant speech.

"The question seems to me irrelevant at the present juncture," he said, mildly, and Henry Valcroze, K.C., sat down again with a jerk of the head that seemed to indicate triumph, leaving Jerome no whit disconcerted, but suavely ready to make some fresh attack on the man before him.

As for Desmond, he no longer stood there easily with that faintly insolent look of mouth and eyes, but tensely upright, his hands gripping the edge of the witness-box, waited for Jerome's next attack.

That last question had aroused the keenest interest in the Court; everybody was waiting with hope aroused to hear something that would satisfy their curiosity and Pauline, breathing a little unsteadily, feared lest Desmond should lose his discretion, and make some ill-advised answer that



would lead to difficulty; she was so disturbed by the fear that she lost the next question or two, but was recalled to her present surroundings by hearing Jerome putting a query that sent a little shudder through her of shame and anger.

There was a slight stir in the Court, and the judge looked at the witness with some evident anxiety; in private life he knew him quite well, and had known him since a child, and it shocked him beneath all his outward severity to see what a tangled unhappy thing Desmond had made out of his life.

In reply to that last query Desmond spoke shortly, yet, so it seemed to Pauline, with painful distinctness.

"Yes, I admit the intimacy."

Jerome nodded.

"I thought you would. And you consider such acts quite honourable—quite the acts of a man who is considered to be a gentleman?"

Desmond's face was hard and blank under the fire of such cross-examination, and he looked years older.

"I gave the matter no thought whatever," he said.

"No? Did you also give no thought whatever to the fact that any observer, such as a servant or caller, might think your conduct—peculiar?"

Desmond's fingers tightened a little more on the rail before him.

"I imagine a flirtation is not a crime," he said, between his teeth, feeling with every strained nerve that Pauline was listening to each word of this shameful examination.

"Flirtation?" Jerome's lips twisted into a cynical smile. "You have the modern tolerance of outlook, Lord Desmond. Flirtation is not the word I should use for your behaviour." He paused a moment, glanced down at his brief, and then resumed.

"And on this particular day of which we are speaking, you say you kissed this lady?"

"Yes."

"Passionately?"

"Yes."

"Did you make any other suggestion, by word or act, that you desired her?"

"No."

"On any other occasion?"

"No."

"Yet with no further encouragement from you she joined you at Folkestone on the night of the quarrel with her husband?"

Desmond's brain worked rapidly; he saw the trap into which he was being drawn.

"We were intimate friends. She came to Folkestone merely to annoy her husband," he said.

"For the same cause—just to annoy her husband—she telephoned to town saying she had joined you?"



"Yes."

"Such conduct was indiscreet, surely?"

"Very."

"You say you showed annoyance when she arrived?"

"Yes."

"You gave her some supper, talked for a while in the lounge, then bade each other good night and did not meet till after breakfast the next morning?"

"That is so."

Pauline's hands twisted convulsively together; she felt in that instant that she could have borne anything rather than hear him tell that deliberate lie—even though the conventional code of honour demanded that he should ignore truth if necessary to protect the woman he had injured.

But Jerome was speaking again, and she forced herself to listen.

"Why did you not go immediately to another hotel?"

His voice was once more less brutal, and the attention of his colleagues became, if possible, more acute, but Desmond's grip on the rails relaxed a little; the strain of the scene seemed to him for the moment to be less intense.

"I was too angry about the whole thing to bother about it," he said.

"Indeed? Remiss of you. Very remiss. And you said, I think, that you did not see Mrs. Cardew

again till the following morning after breakfast, in the vestibule?"

"Yes."

"Quite so. That will do, thank you."

Desmond walked down the steps and came back to his seat, looking neither to right nor left. Even Pauline could read nothing in his face. She felt a thrill of pity for Lord Clere who sat with his grey head bowed, and his hand shading his eyes, but her attention was speedily riveted once more on Jerome who was addressing the judge.

"My lord, I beg to call another witness whose evidence will, I believe, be of service. Mr. Soames."

A seedy-looking individual, with clothes too big for him, stepped into the box, repeated the oath in a husky voice, and, after replying to a few questions in response to Jerome's order, opened his remarkably large mouth and repeated, parrotlike, his story.

He was the boots at the Imperial Hotel, Folkestone, he had been for his evening out, and was, therefore, making his nightly round an hour later than usual on the night in question.

He met a lady—"in bright yellor she was, sort of velvet dress, and white fur on her feet—yes, bare they was," coming along a passage. She went into room 119—yes, he knew he was on his oath.

Could he swear to the lady? Yes. No. 119 was occupied by the last witness—yes, he knew.



He saw him later the next day when his man was packing.

Asked to identify Madge, he did so at once—Jerome thanked him with slightly exaggerated politeness and dismissed him, and the famous K.C. turned to the judge.

"I think, my lord, that this makes the case sufficiently clear, but if your lordship is not satisfied, I can call further witnesses."

His lordship agreed that it might be desirable; Madge's maid stated that she had seen Lord Desmond leave his room at half-past seven on the Sunday morning, and that shortly afterwards her mistress returned to her own, which she had not occupied all night. In reply to a query as to her source of knowledge, she admitted having climbed the low stone partition on the balcony, running along the front of the hotel, thus obtaining a view of the interior of her mistress' bedroom, shortly before Lord Desmond left his room.

Madge, a vision of Parisian smartness in dark blue and silver, twisted her long gloves together till they split, on hearing of this piece of spy work, and the judge spoke wearily as if the burden of the heat accentuated that of his position.

"I think that is sufficient——"

CHAPTER XIX

A QUARTER of an hour later the Court rose, and in a couple of minutes the wide stone corridors without, a few seconds ago totally deserted, were full of animated people.

Spectators, all eager to discuss the opinions they had formed, talked and stood about in groups, bewigged barristers, equally eager to discuss points, strolled along arm in arm, solicitors' clerks bustled about full of importance, and from Room IVA came the people most concerned, Valcroze, Jerome, Lord Clere and his son.

Desmond, walking beside his father, heeded no one in all the eager, whispering crowd; his face was ashen, his mouth a hard line, his eyes expressionless and hard, and his soul was sick within him.

He was suffering hideously, though his face betrayed nothing to the curious crowd that whispered and stared as he walked rapidly through the passages; he felt as though his innermost self had been stripped naked, and only the intolerant pride, that had always been his most marked characteristic, stood by him now.

Out in the hot sunshine, Lord Clere's car was waiting, and just as they were about to enter, a



newsboy ran up, thrusting a paper almost into the hands of a man who was waiting close beside the car, to cross the street.

"'Ere y'are, sir! Latest developments of the Harbyn-Cardew case. Lord Desmond Harbyn in the witness box, hinterestin' details——"

The man pushed him aside.

"Get out!" he said, savagely, and Desmond caught sight of his white, strained face, as he spoke. It was Raven Cardew, and, meeting Desmond's glance, he turned sharply on his heel and walked away. The one person Desmond dreaded, yet longed to see, was Pauline, but she did not appear, and suddenly he felt the impossibility of getting into the waiting car and driving back home with his father; an imperative need of bodily exercise claimed him, and he spoke abruptly.

"D'you mind if I don't come back now? I want to walk."

Lord Clere hesitated, one foot on the running board; like his son, he was a proud man, but during these last hours his pride had suffered a severe shock, and he looked old and ill in an afternoon.

"You will be back to dine?" he asked, and Desmond read the anxiety in look and tone.

"Yes," he said. "I promise to be back in an hour or two, but I want some fresh air."

His father nodded, and got back into the car; and as it drove away, Desmond saw him lean wearily back into the corner, and his head sink on

his breast like that of a broken man; and a new pain stabbed him.

Hitherto he had regarded the whole business only as it affected Pauline and himself; now, another factor had appeared in the case, his father. He was responsible for the heaviest blow his father had ever received, for Lord Clere was an honourable and very great gentleman, and he, his son, had brought shame upon him in his old age.

Walking rapidly, avoiding collision or accident solely by instinct, Desmond reached the Embankment, hoping there for some cool air, but even the river failed to bring its accustomed breeze, and the atmosphere was stale and heavy around him. The high walls, with their ugly fumed-oak wainscot, the rows of benches packed with people, the whispering barristers, the shameful questions asked and answered; every detail had burned itself into his brain; sordid, indecent in its publicity, and hideously matter-of-fact; and he shrank, sickened both bodily and physically, from the ordeal through which he had passed. As suddenly as it had arisen, his desire for exercise faded. All he wanted now was to hide himself from the prying eyes that had watched him for the last five hours, and seemed to watch him now from every face he met.

Hailing a taxi, he drove home, went straight up to his own rooms, and locked himself in, till his man's repeated knocking warned him that it was nearly dinner time.



Civilised society demands that certain trivial rules be kept, whether hearts break or lives are wrecked. Trains have to be caught, business attended to, life lived in conformation with its accustomed routine; it is necessary to dress and undress, to wash and eat, though the soul is sick unto death; and Desmond bathed and dressed and went down to dinner, following out his habit of life, while all he longed for was solitude and darkness.

His mother, with pale face and reddened eyes, his father, outwardly calm and dignified as ever, Eve, and his youngest sister Stella, were waiting in the drawing-room for him.

As Desmond sat down to dinner, he felt a sudden kick on the ankle, and looking round, he met his young sister's glance, full of a rather defiant sympathy, and caught a muttered:

"Buck up, Desmond. What's it matter?"

He nodded in acknowledgement of this somewhat tactless attempt at help, and signed impatiently to the butler to bring him something to drink.

Eve tried nobly to make conversation, Lord Clere responded as nobly, but Lady Clere sat through dinner in complete silence, with reddened eyes and occasionally trembling lips, and Desmond longed for Easton, who would have been a tower of strength on such an occasion as this.

It was a miserable meal, and when it was over Lord Clere had to go back to the House of Lords,

and Eve back to the home she had so deserted these last few weeks; so Desmond, unable to face the prospect of an evening tête-à-tête with his mother, made his excuses and left with his sister.

The evening was still very hot, and they walked slowly through to Curzon Street, hardly speaking, yet both relieved to be out of the house.

Just before they reached Eve's home, Desmond broke the silence between them:

"Well, to-morrow will see the end," he said, with savage abruptness; "and whatever it is, it can't be much worse than to-day has been. Good night, Eve."

"Good night, Desmond,"—Eve held his hand, and looked anxiously at him. "I wish I could help you, but no one can. Good night, my dear."

She went in, and Desmond swung on his heel and went southward down Half Moon Street to the Green Park, where he slackened his pace, and walked more reasonably, staring across to where the towers of Westminster stood up darkly against the summer sky.

He thought of Pauline and longed to see her, but he felt ashamed to go to her, yet his feet took him, almost unconsciously, in her direction, and he was nearly at the Cock-Pit steps in St. James' Park, when a husky voice stopped him:

"Give us a copper, guv'nor. S'welp me, I've not 'ad a bite since yesterday."

He glanced round mechanically, and saw a de-



pressed-looking individual in shabby clothes shambling beside him, who, not being instantly told to go to hell, began to repeat his statement.

Desmond cut him short.

"A drink is what you mean, I expect," he said. "Well, it's nothing to do with me. Here you are."

He thrust some silver into the out-stretched hand, and so bewildered the unfortunate one beside him that he was left behind gasping; but a minute later the husky voice came again:

"You're a gentleman, you are—a real gentleman. And it's a treat to know there's one left. Gawd bless you."

Desmond looked down at the unshaven, hungry face.

"There are not many people who would endorse your opinion," he said; and, seized by a freak of fancy, added: "I am Lord Desmond Harbyn."

The other stared, swore, then nodded like a wise and disreputable owl.

"Women!" he remarked, sagely. "There ain't no doin' anyfink wif em. I 'eard abart the case. Ho yus! 'Oo hasn't? But 'taint no good takin' women seriously. They all let you down. Can't 'elp it. It's in 'em. An' don't you marry—no, not ever. T'aint worth it. Keep clear of 'em. Don't marry, that's my advice."

Desmond laughed. The whimsicality of his conversation in the middle of the Green Park with a wastrel of the streets amused him.

Ten minutes later he was at Pauline's house in Little Clock Street.

"Madame de Fleurian has just gone up to her room," the maid said, rather doubtfully; "but if your lordship will wait a moment I'll tell her."

Desmond waited in the small panelled dining-room, his head very nearly touching the low ceiling, content to be there just because it was her room, content to look, just because these were the things upon which her eyes daily rested. On the old Chippendale sideboard stood an old two-handled silver cup, filled with great spikes of delphinium and lupin, a mass of lovely blue against the pale cream of the walls; and despite his wretchedness, Desmond smiled as his eyes rested on them, the splash of rich colour was so like Pauline.

He had barely time to note that she had a new picture, a small water-colour of some corner of Southern Italy, when the door opened, and she entered.

"Desmond!" she exclaimed, her voice low, yet eager and anxious. "I am so sorry, I had just gone to bed."

He did not catch her in his arms after his usual fashion but stood back looking at her, his face hardly less white than his shirt front in the dim light of the room. She had twisted her hair up in the nape of her neck, night black against the deep creamy pallor of her skin; the sudden anxious



rousing had dilated her wonderful eyes till they seemed all velvety pupil; her feet in the fur-edged mules were bare, and she was wrapped in a gown of jade-green brocaded velvet, with heavy white fur at sleeves and the back of the neck. There was something utterly un-English in her appearance, and Desmond began to tremble as he watched her. His silence added to her anxiety, and she came swiftly to him, and put her hands up on his shoulders.

"Desmond, my dearest, what is it? I thought you were not coming to-night, and so I went to bed early, as I had a headache."

Her sleeves fell back from her arms as she lifted them, and the long curving line from wrist to shoulder showed ivory-white against the jade velvet. He felt as though some force was chaining his limbs and binding a band like fire about his head, and the more he tried to speak the more he felt his gaze drawn to those bare, slender arms.

Then came her last words, the suggestion of her pain, and the racing, surging blood cooled in his veins, and that dangerous heat of passion subsided; and, though his hands were still trembling as he laid them over hers, his voice was steady.

"A headache? My darling, that is because you've had such a wretched day, and now I, selfish brute that I am, have disturbed you."

Relieved at his normal tone, yet warned by her instinct not to risk too much, she drew back and

glanced at the sideboard, turning to practical matters for refuge.

"It's a very willing disturbance," she said, smiling. "Now you must have something to drink, for I'm sure you are tired and thirsty."

Before she could carry out her intention, however, he stopped her.

"No, thank you, dear," he said. "I'm not going to stay . . . I just wanted a glimpse of you, that's all, and now I'm going . . . and you're going to bed."

"Will you go too?" she asked, half smiling, half anxious. "You look very exhausted, and I can't take care of you as I would wish."

He promised, lifted her hands and kissed them, then at her request rang the bell and was shown out into the quiet solitude of the little Westminster street; and far overhead, in the starlit shadows, the Abbey chimes rang out their memorial of ancient faith.



CHAPTER XX

“CAN I have a few minutes with you before you go? I’ve something I want to see you about.”

Raven Cardew was just changing into his cassock before going into the church for the Wednesday evening service, at which he was preaching, and the Reverend Robert Welby had but just arrived. He nodded assent to the request, and Welby, pursing up his thin lips, went over to the cupboard and took out his surplice. Unlike his rector, he always wore his cassock, both in the church and in the streets; and although he had come in much later, he was ready as soon. The service was short, and he took it at high speed, and when Raven went into the pulpit, he sat back in his stall, folded his arms, and stared at nothing, with an expression on his face oddly like triumph.

Pauline, who was sitting near the front of the church, and who had no more use for the senior curate than he had for her, noticed that look, and was puzzled by it, and Raven noticed it too, when at last the service was over, and he was alone in the vestry with his colleague.

For Welby put away his surplice, and then sat

down by the red felt-covered table, and looked at his rector.

"If you are free now, I shall only keep you a few minutes," he said, and Raven went over to the fireplace and stood back to it, in time-honoured fashion.

"I am at your service," he said. "What is it, Welby? Somebody in trouble?"

"No. Not exactly that," the other replied. "It's a personal matter, and an unpleasant one at that."

"Personal?" Raven lifted his eyebrows. "Unpleasant? You're mysterious. Come to the point quickly then."

"Very well," Welby said briefly, "I will. Cardew, Lord Desmond Harbyn's name is being coupled with that of your sister, Madame de Fleurian."

For a second, Raven was too amazed to speak, then he drew a quick breath, and spoke through shut teeth:

"What authority have you got for saying such a thing?" he said. Welby drew a folded paper from his pocket and handed it over.

"I do not quote that as my authority," he said. "But I advance it as proof that what I say is true, when I say there is gossip about Madame de Fleurian."

Raven took the paper, and unfolded it without a word. It was the current week's issue of a notorious and popular paper, and on the outer cover



were the words "The Mysterious Lady," and inside, on the page which Welby had indicated, was a short paragraph, referring to the case that was attracting everybody's attention, and ending up with the usual sting in the tail.

"It is interesting to note that the learned counsel, Jerome, only voiced public rumour when he said that Lord Desmond Harbyn must be in love with somebody else other than the charming defendant, for it is quite well known that he is a constant evening visitor at a certain delightful house in Little Clock Street, Westminster, the owner of which, Madame de F——, is quite one of the most arresting personalities in London. She is also beautiful, and a widow, and Lord Desmond seems to share our admiration for her. But one wonders what her family would say if the attachment becomes public."

Raven read the paragraph through twice before he dared trust himself to speak. A veritable white heat of fury possessed him, against the scurrilous gossip before him, and against Welby for bringing it to his notice; and when, at last, he spoke, his voice was thick and unsteady:

"It's a lie, a damnable lie! What other *proof* have you?"

Welby sat back in his chair and surveyed his rector's strained, white face with coldly-satisfied gaze. He had always been an opponent of the worldly circle in which Raven moved and from

which he came, and it gave him a certain unconsciously cruel satisfaction to find himself so justified.

"Yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Loughton asked me if it were true that Madame de Fleurian was to marry Lord Desmond when this disgraceful affair was over, and if you, as a priest, would permit it. A day or so before, Colonel North mentioned to me that he had seen them together one evening at a restaurant in Soho, and again, when he was calling at a house in Little Clock Street, he saw Lord Desmond drive up just before dinner, and dismiss his taxi. I am aware that I am repeating gossip, but even gossip may be dangerous, and I consider that it is necessary you should be informed as to what is being said. I am sorry you did not hear it for yourself."

During the speech, Raven made a great effort to overcome the rage that had nearly mastered him, and the habit of years standing him in good stead, he had sufficient control of himself, by the time Welby ended, to speak more or less quietly.

"You say Colonel North said this to you," he said—Colonel North was the senior church warden, and a man of great integrity of character. It was sufficient proof of the truth of the thing that he had brought himself to speak of it, and that Raven knew. Welby nodded.

"Yes. He was undecided whether to speak to you direct or not. It seems that Mrs. Loughton

had spoken to him before, and also these friends of his in Little Clock Street, Mr. and Mrs. Gifford. It seems they are friends of some member of the Harbyn family."

Raven let the paper fall, and stood for a moment looking at nothing, then he began pacing up and down the narrow vestry, trying to think. It was Welby who spoke first.

"I imagine you will hardly deny that there must be some foundation for this gossip."

Raven came to an abrupt standstill.

"Well, and if there is, what then?" he said, sharply.

"Then it is your duty to interfere and put a stop to it," Welby retorted. "You are a priest, and a priest cannot afford to allow the members of his family to cause a scandal. It is incumbent upon you to investigate the matter."

"Supposing it is true, supposing even that this disreputable rag"—he kicked the crumpled paper where it lay—"for once has published the truth. Suppose my sister and Lord Desmond Harbyn do see one another . . . what then?"

His voice was no longer thick and unsteady, it was quiet and rather curious in tone. Welby looked at him with narrowed eyes, and rose from his chair.

"Then it is your duty as a priest to forbid Madame de Fleurian to continue in such a course of action. You must see what such scandal means,

you must know that by closing your eyes to it you are tacitly approving. And there is too much laxity already . . . You are a priest, you have set before yourself the ideal of the ascetic and priestly life. You cannot permit even your own sister to bring that ideal into disrepute."

Raven's white heat of fury was changing into a cold, still anger. He spoke levelly.

"You are very dogmatic in your assertions as to my duty," he said. "But you have not told me exactly what that duty is. Be good enough to do so."

Harsh, narrow and ungenerous as Welby was, he was, nevertheless, entirely sincere, and he was startled and dismayed by the way in which his rector was receiving the report he had given him.

"If you cannot see your duty it is not my place to tell it you," he said, harshly. "I have done mine in placing the matter before you."

He turned away, picked up his hat, and went towards the door, but before he could reach it Raven's voice stopped him.

"Welby, wait a moment."

He turned and waited obediently, he was scrupulous in such a thing towards any senior priest, and Raven came a step towards him. His face was white, his eyes shining, there was a sense of tension that even the unobservant elder man could not fail to feel. When there was not more than a couple of feet or so between them, Raven spoke:

"You will answer my question before you leave this room," he said, and there was that in his voice Welby had never heard before. "I have met people like you too often before, who are satisfied to make mischief under the guise of duty. Duty! Duty? My God, I'm sick of the very name of it! Sick of all the hypocrisy and intolerance that cloaks itself with the name. Sick of the whole narrow, miserable business. If my sister and Lord Desmond love one another, what is that to you, or me, or any one but themselves? Why? Why? Why?"

He broke off fiercely, and Welby drew back in sheer amazement. It was his turn to be startled into silence, a silence of absolute dismay; he made a vague gesture with his hands, and looked in horror at his companion.

"Why?" he gasped at last. "You ask why? Do you dare stand up as a priest before the altar, and ask why you should interfere when the laws of God are broken?"

"What laws of God do you refer to?" Raven demanded. "You are very ready to generalise."

"The laws that forbid the giving of offence to the weaker brethren . . . the avoiding of the appearance of evil. If you countenance this dreadful affair, if, when he is already an adulterer, you permit your sister to marry Lord Desmond, then I, as a fellow priest, tell you you are as sinful as he is . . . that you are not fit to hold your holy office."

There was a sudden silence, as the harsh stern voice ended, a silence different from those that had gone before; it was as though the atmosphere had become electric with the tension that precedes the outbreak of storm.

Welby, unable to recognise the mistake of his method, stood by the door, his brilliant eyes alight with the intensity of his feeling and the fierce denunciation of what he sincerely believed to be a terrible and an evil thing, his whole thin, worn frame tense with excitement; and before him stood Raven, still, as though all life had been suddenly frozen in his veins, the last words ringing and re-ringing in his ears:

“ . . . You are not fit to hold your holy office.”

The little clock on the mantelpiece struck the half hour after nine, the verger, waiting to close the church, opened the vestry door, saw the two men, and retreated with a muffled apology; and at last, Raven spoke:

“Your accusation is quite just. I am not fit to hold my office, and I intend to resign it. Good night.”

He made a movement for Welby to go; but Welby, utterly taken aback by such an answer, stared and did not stir; it was Raven who spake, and his voice was quite colourless:

“Please say nothing to any one till I have seen the Bishop . . . and please let me pass. I do not wish to discuss the matter any further.”



Silenced, the other drew back, and Raven passed him, and went out into the hot June night, aware that he had taken an irrecoverable step, and dazed a little by all the conflicting motions of the last half hour.

The night was starless, and overcast with a thick, heavy pall of cloud, and Raven, after the tension of those last minutes, felt an oppression that was almost physical in the hot, still streets. He walked slowly, his limbs feeling as though they were of lead, and amid the tumult of his thoughts came the bitter realisation of two facts: the one, his own deliberate burning of his boats, the other his dull, bitter anger against Pauline. Looking back over these past months, he traced all his growing dissatisfaction and uneasiness to her disturbing personality; he thought of her first arrival in London, her slender, exquisite figure, in its severe gown of black velvet, standing on the hearth in the drawing-room in South Audley Street, the dazzling whiteness of neck and breast and arms, the diamond chain she wore, and the great square emerald on her right hand, and the night blackness of her hair and wonderful eyes against the pallor of her face. She had entered into his life, had disturbed his hard-won serenity, shattered his peace of mind, torn down the sand-ramparts of hard work that he had built around his soul by sheer personality; and now for her sake he had quarrelled with a man he sincerely respected, and because of her, taken a

step that must cut him off for ever from his life work. He felt bitterly resentful, and as bitterly helpless; and when he entered the Rectory, he went straight to his study and wrote a letter to his Bishop, requesting an interview, for he realised that he must act without delay.

That once done, the causes that had led to this final act came once again to his mind. The gossip of the paper, with its hateful, veiled suggestiveness, would, of necessity, do harm, yet that, in itself, could not be brought to book, for the reason that any one who knew that paper's reputation must realise. Yet at the same time, it was necessary that Pauline should be aware what was said about her, and should, at least, have the opportunity of refuting it if she thought fit.

Till the early morning hours, Raven worried and puzzled over the manner of so doing, and finally he wrote a brief note to her, asking her if she could come and see him on the morrow, or if he might call and see her, posted it, and went to bed, facing sleepless hours of thought that were entirely fruitless.



CHAPTER XXI

A HEAVY thunder rain was falling, and the sky was veined with lightning, when Pauline alighted from her taxi the following afternoon, and was shown into her brother's comfortless study about four o'clock.

Raven was at his desk, writing; and as she entered, he rose and gave her one swift look that enveloped her from the crown of her black and silver hat to the tip of her shoes.

"Good afternoon," he said, formally, as though he were speaking to a stranger. "It was good of you to come."

She let her cloak drop back on the chair as she sat down, facing him, and ignoring any preliminaries came straight to the point.

"What was it you wished to see me about?" she asked. "Please tell me at once. I am perplexed by your request."

He did not reply for a moment. Her very presence disconcerted him, and her calm regard made him feel that he hated his task. She, however, did not appear to share his uneasiness, for there was a hint of sharpness in her tone when she spoke again:

"Please tell me the reason of your letter."

He met her eyes, and hesitated no longer, instinct telling him that it was best to be quite direct in his statement; and she sat quite still, her glance never wavering, undisturbed, almost, he would have thought, uninterested, but that he could see the great emerald cutting into her fingers, so rigid was the clasp of her hands.

In some strange way, that sight softened him, and he came over and sat down near her.

"Pauline," he said, "is it true? Do you love Desmond Harbyn?"

She met his glance steadily; there was no embarrassment in her eyes, but beneath the pallor of her skin crept a lovely warm flush that answered his question before her words came, quietly, yet with a vibrant thrill in them that made his heart ache.

"Yes," she said, "we love one another."

The admission stunned him for the moment, and, misreading his silence, she smiled rather scornfully.

"You wanted the truth," she said. "Now you have it. What is the good of it to you?"

The smile, the absence of confusion, and that wonderful soft light in her eyes, stung him into quick self-defence; leaning forward, he clenched his hands together.

"Don't look at me like that!" he exclaimed. "Don't sneer—do you think I *wanted* to say this to you? Do you think I like interfering with what should concern no one but you—and him?"

"Then why did you do it?" she flashed back.
"You've had your answer."

Entirely heedless of her command, he went on speaking.

"Do you understand what you're doing? Do you realise that you're in love with the lover of another woman? Do you——" She interrupted him.

"I understand everything but your assumption of authority. Since I have caused trouble in your congregation—since they are so righteous that they consider themselves entitled to draw their skirts away from me in case they should be contaminated, I'll leave London. I'm sorry you should have been annoyed by my affairs, but I'm more than annoyed by your attitude to me, and this is the last time we need meet to discuss either this or any other subject. Ever since I came back to England you have shown me how deeply you resented my presence, and even now, when because of that resentment I took a house of my own, you cannot forgive me for daring to intrude upon your life. My love for Desmond, and his for me, is none of our making—it came to us unasked, unsought—it has made us suffer as even I have never suffered before, and there is nothing before us in this life but separation. I came home, lonely, and beaten by life to find love too late—is that a crime in your eyes? Do you think I do not understand? Do you think we *wanted* to love? Wanted to break our hearts

as we are doing? Oh, it's you that do not understand . . . you . . . not me . . . or Desmond."

She broke off, panting, and closed her eyes, fighting to keep back the storm of emotion that threatened to overwhelm her, and presently the utter stillness of the room was broken by Raven's voice, low and tense, as she had never heard it.

"Pauline—you think I'm hard and cold—you think I don't understand. And because of that I'm going to tell you something that I've never told to any human being . . . something that I've hidden all these years . . . will you listen?"

She nodded, without opening her eyes, not able to answer, and he began to speak in a low rapid tone.

"I was studying for the Bar when I first met the woman I fell in love with and, though I'd been just as impressionable as the average young man, I knew, directly I saw her, that here was the one woman I wanted to marry, that unless she'd have me I wouldn't ever care again. And after a while I told her, and she . . . she told me she loved me, but she wouldn't marry me. I didn't know why, I begged and implored her to tell me, but she asked me to wait—to wait. She begged me to trust her, because she was in great trouble . . . I swore I'd always trust her . . . oh, I promised readily enough . . . and one day . . . her husband came. He was out in Pekin . . . in a big position in the

diplomatic world . . . and then I knew why she had refused to marry me. I went to see her, I didn't wait for any explanation, I was insane with jealousy and misery, and I think I cursed her for breaking my life . . . and then I went away. She wrote to me. I burned her letters unread . . . and one day, some months later, heard of her death. Her lawyers sent for me . . . and I went. They had a letter . . . her last letter to me. It was a little stuffy office in Lincoln's Inn where I read it . . . I can see it all when I shut my eyes . . . oh God . . . that letter . . . in it she told me that she had divorced her husband for gross cruelty and infidelity, that she was waiting for the decree to be made absolute when she met me . . . she hadn't had the courage to tell me then, and that's why she'd asked me to trust her just three months . . . and then he came to see her . . . and I refused to listen to her explanation . . . refused to hear one word, or trust her for one minute . . . and he guessed that she loved me . . . he was a clever man, with money and influence. He got the decree rescinded . . . he demanded that she should live with him again . . . and I wouldn't answer . . . I sent her letters back unopened . . . unopened . . . so she just gave in because she couldn't bear any more. And he gave her a child . . . and soon after her doctor told her she was ill . . . that he had made her ill . . . and it was born blind . . .

and it died . . . two days before she did. Then I knew what I'd done . . . that I'd murdered her and broken her heart."

As he ceased speaking, he sat staring in front of him, with eyes that saw only the ghost of his dead love staring into remoteness from an ashen face; and Pauline spoke very quietly.

"Why did you tell me?" she asked.

"Why?" he started a little and, turning, looked at her. "Because you are like her—you have the same white skin and great dark eyes—and you told me I didn't understand. You thought I was a priest—not a man. Well—now you know."

She nodded, twisting the great emerald round and round on her finger, and, unknown to him, fighting her pride, and, as she made no answer, he got up heavily, like an overburdened man and, going to the window, looked out into the garden. After a minute he spoke again.

"You needn't leave London. I'm going to do that. I've written to the Bishop to resign the living."

"Resign the living?" Pauline cried, startled for the moment out of the deeper emotions. "Raven—why?"

He stood rigidly still for a moment, then he slowly turned round and faced her, and his eyes were desolate like a winter night sky.

"Because I can't go on," he said. "I'm not fit. Before you came I forced myself to forget . . . I

tried to think of others . . . I cut everything out but the work . . . I refused to regard my body as anything but a slave. Look at this room—there's nothing beautiful—there's no comfort. I tried to make my life like that—and I succeeded, I put everything away from me but the church and the church's work. And then you came—friendship, beauty, comfort, affection—and the need for it came back like a flood. I was afraid to be with you. Afraid to take the affection that you offered, and that I was starving for . . . starving. I realised I was a man, not a machine—that I was losing the best years of my life, that, in trying to serve God, I'd shown the blackest ingratitude for His gifts. That I'd set myself up as a teacher of others, when I was only fit to be the humblest listener. That I couldn't bear the blank loneliness of it all—the loneliness I'd deliberately chosen—and so I'm giving it up. I'm not fit to teach others. I want to be taught myself.”

He ceased speaking and, turning away, dropped down into a chair, his back towards her, and leant his head on his hands. He felt exhausted, both in mind and body, by the emotions of the last hour, exhausted and on the verge of an utter breakdown of self-control. He hardly knew why he had laid bare his jealously guarded secret to Pauline, save that she had shown him how bitterly she had been hurt by him . . . he wished she would go . . . he felt he could not bear much more—and suddenly

he felt an arm about him, felt a soft cheek pressed against his temple, and Pauline's voice, broken by tears, was speaking.

"Raven—oh, my dear, let's help each other if we can . . . we need it so sorely . . . we've borne as much as we can . . . Raven——"

She felt Raven's arm about her, and his face pressed against hers, heard him whisper.

"Pauline—forgive me—forgive me——" and then she broke into desperate weeping.

CHAPTER XXII

THE case was over, and Desmond felt a curious sense of relief now that he knew the worst. So long as there had been a doubt of the issue, a faint hope that, even yet, he might be free, so long had anxiety racked him. Now, when Eve expected him to break down with the strain, he surprised her by throwing off the gloomy silence that had become almost his every-day manner, and startled Lord Clere by announcing that he wanted to get out of the country and into a job.

"But—Pauline?" Eve said, tentatively, when they were alone. "In six or seven months you will marry Madge, and then what will happen? This is your last chance to be with Pauline."

"It is my last chance to show Pauline that I'm not going to be as utterly rotten in the future as I have been in the past," he said. "Look here, Eve—I'm done with life as I lived it both before the war and since. And if I can get something stiff to do, so much the better."

Later, as he was walking to Madge's flat in New Cavendish Street where he was expected to dine, he came face-to-face with Raven on his way back from the interview with the Bishop, and to his surprise Raven stopped him.

"Good evening, Harbyn," he said. "I wanted to see you."

"You wanted to see me," Desmond echoed, letting his surprise be heard in his voice. "Why?"

He noticed how worn and ill the other looked, and he wondered, rather scornfully, why; in order to be a teacher of men, it was necessary to throw away bodily health. Raven's voice interrupted his thoughts with a jar.

"Because of my sister, Pauline told me last night of the attachment between you."

"What?"

Desmond drew back, with a violent start that betrayed the state of his nerves, and Raven, heedless of the sudden blaze of anger in his eyes, went on speaking.

"May I walk a little way with you?" he said. "I've startled you. Well, Pauline startled me. I can't pretend I'm not sorry. It's nothing but tragedy for you both."

He glanced at his companion, who resumed his walk mechanically, and added almost below his breath:

"I threw away my happiness . . . don't follow my example." Again Desmond started and stared; he was utterly taken aback and furious at the intrusion of any one into his secret affairs; then came his companion's unexpected last words and for the moment he was too surprised to speak. As if Raven divined his discomfort he went on.

"Pauline asked me to tell you that she had given me her confidence. She will tell you why. What are you going to do?"

Much as Desmond would have liked to show his resentment something in the intense sadness of the other's voice prevented him. After a moment he spoke as evenly as he could.

"I am going out of England for the next six months. We both decided that was the best thing if—if your brother won his case. When the decree is made absolute . . .——" his throat went suddenly dry, and he paused a moment to swallow before he could go on—"Madge and I will marry. But I want to get a job, quickly, and my father is helping me."

They had reached New Cavendish Street and Raven halted.

"Thank you for not being too angry," he said, with a sudden whimsical little smile. "Things are happening very unexpectedly for us both. But I think Pauline has forgiven me for a good deal. Good-bye, Harbyn, and good luck."

Desmond went on his way puzzled and disturbed. He wanted nothing as much as to go straight to Pauline and ask her to explain what had happened; instead he must face a dinner party of Madge's friends, and accept his tacit engagement to her.

Two hours later, when hostess and guests were just starting roulette, a maid appeared with a

message—Lord Desmond Harbyn was wanted on the telephone at once.

Desmond pushed back his chair, rose, and glanced at Madge.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" he said, and Madge frowned. She was looking her very best to-night, and she knew it, in a gown of jade and silver brocade, daringly cut, which suited her dark childish beauty to perfection, a beauty enhanced by excitement, which had flushed her cheeks and flamed, star-like, in her eyes.

"Oh, Desmond, can't you send a message? Say you're engaged—say—who is it on the 'phone, Grace?"

Grace looked doubtful.

"I don't know, m'm. It's—I think—it's a lady."

"A lady? Well, tell her his lordship had just left," Madge commanded, with a laugh and a glance for Desmond that, nevertheless, had an edge on it, and Grace was retreating when Desmond stopped her.

"Wait. Excuse me, Madge, but that's impossible. I must go." He waited for no more, but went out of the room, leaving Madge for the moment disconcerted, then she suddenly laughed.

"It *must* be urgent," she cried. "We'll make him tell us when he comes back—Olive! You shall ask him!"

Olive Strange nodded, her sister, Mrs. Dysart, said laughingly to Madge—"I wonder you allow

him to receive mysterious messages from still more mysterious ladies, Madge. I shouldn't. He's far too good looking——" And the game began. Tom Dysart had just won thirty shillings, and everybody was talking when the door opened and Desmond appeared. Instantly he was overwhelmed with laughing, teasing questions till suddenly, something in his face checked them; Madge, quick of apprehension, jumped up.

"What has happened, Desmond?" she demanded. "Who wanted you?" He came slowly across the room looking at her.

"It was my aunt, Lady Henry," he said. "A cable has come through from Basra. My brother is ill and I am going out immediately."

There was an instant's silence. Into Madge's quick brain flashed two thoughts; the one that if Easton died Desmond would be heir to his father's title, the other that, if he left her now, she might lose him for ever. With a little cry she caught his arm.

"Desmond—you can't! Why doesn't Lord Clere go? You can't. You must stay with——"

Quite quietly Desmond put her hand aside.

"I must go at once," he said. "I shall take the morning boat to Paris. Please forgive my breaking up your evening like this, but you will all understand. Madge—will you see me out?"

For a second she hesitated, then she shrugged her shoulders.

"It's perfectly absurd for you to go tearing off to the east," she exclaimed. "Of course I'm very sorry about Easton, but I don't see why you should have to go. I can't come down now. I'll see you off by the morning train."

His eyes narrowed in the curious way they had when he was angry; without a word he bowed and went out of the room, and two minutes later was out of the building, just as Madge rushed to the head of the stairs and called after him:

"Desmond! Desmond! Wait one moment!"

He did not hear her, however, and her lips quivered in quick remorse. Spoiled as she was, what love she had for any one but herself, she had given to Desmond, and she had ended by hurting herself more than him.

He got a taxi in Portland Place, and was home in a very few minutes to find Lady Henry waiting for him in the morning room.

"Your mother's gone to bed. The shock turned her faint," she said abruptly, as he entered. "I wired on to your father, but I imagine you won't wait to see him."

Desmond nodded.

"That's so. I shall leave for Paris first thing in the morning, and get east as quickly as I can. What's the exact news? Have you got the cable?"

Without a word she handed it to him, and he read it through; like all of its kind it was a brief, unsatisfactory message enough. Easton was ill

and unable to proceed north. Could someone go out and bring him home.

A rapid calculation of times, some urgent telephone calls, and Desmond was off again, to return an hour later with the news that an English destroyer, going east, would pick him up at Marseilles on the following Friday, and take him straight through to Aden, where he could get a coasting trader to take him up to Basra where Easton apparently was.

The situation was a difficult one; Desmond sent for Hargood, gave him a few orders, and was horrified to see it was just after twelve. For a moment he stared, unbelievably, at his watch, realising with a shock of dismay that he could not see Pauline that night. A morning visit might or might not be possible—it would depend on so many things, and before he went to bed he wrote her a long letter in case even a farewell might be denied him.

It turned out to be a good thing that he did so, for Lord Clere arrived just after eight the next morning, having motored all night to reach London before Desmond left, and, through a hurried and unsatisfactory breakfast, discussed the possible ways of arranging for any help Desmond should need if difficulties arose owing to transport in such a highly-unsettled part of the world.

The boat-train went at ten—Desmond looked at his watch just as a footman appeared to say he

was wanted on the telephone. He swallowed a last mouthful of coffee as he rose, hoping against hope that it might be Pauline, though knowing quite well that she would not be in the least likely to ring him up. Yet, with that desire for the unreasonable which is sometimes apparent in times of stress, he took up the receiver and spoke eagerly.

"Hullo! Who is it?"

Back along the wires came Madge's voice dulling his foolish hopes.

"Madge speaking. Desmond, I shall be at Victoria at a quarter to ten—on the platform. Good luck."

She rang off before he had time to say more than a brief affirmative, and he stood for a moment, frowning at the portrait of his mother that stood facing him on the big writing table, holding the telephone. Then he looked at his watch again. It was ten minutes past nine. There was no time for indecision; if he wanted to see Pauline he must make some arrangement quickly, and picking up the receiver once more he called for her number, got through, surprisingly enough, at once, gave his name, and asked for Madame de Fleurian in tones that trembled a little with anxiety. Back came the answer promptly enough.

"Madame de Fleurian left town yesterday afternoon, my lord—she left word that if your

lordship telephoned I was to say she would be back just after lunch."

Desmond drew a quick breath.

"Thank you. Tell Madame de Fleurian that I have written," he said, and, pushing the telephone away, he sat for a moment motionless, with sagging shoulders, like a man who had received a violent blow.

Such a possibility had not occurred to him, and dull despair seized him; he remembered, after a little, that Pauline had told him that she was going to dine with some friends in Sussex, and stay the night, but in the sudden confusion that had followed the cablegram, the engagement had slipped his memory.

Forty-five minutes later he had made his farewell to Madge, and was seated in the Dover train on the first stage of his journey east.

CHAPTER XXIII

“YOU’LL find the easiest way is to keep to the track on the left of the water-course. The road gets a good deal worse after you cross the Khanjara Hills, still it’s the only way. Good-bye and good luck.”

The speaker lifted his hand in friendly salute and stepped back into the shade of his verandah, and Desmond, returning the salute, gathered up his reins and put his horse to an easy trot. Before him was a wide stretch of stony country, sloping up to low bare hills some ten miles away, across which lay the rough track that would serve him for a road. Behind him was the small town of Khanjara, his last stopping place in the way of a town till he should reach the little fortified post of Azruli, a hundred and ten miles away across the Arabian desert.

The last news he had had of his brother was a telegram at Baghdad, saying he was better, but very weak, and that he would be left at Azruli when the small force of regulars marched north-east, on their way to the Caspian, where they hoped to join the main body of troops, operating in that part of the world.

The journey from Basra to Baghdad and

Khanjara had been accomplished in record time by the aid of the ubiquitous Ford car, and thanks to the fact that the tribesmen seemed, for the moment, to be peaceably inclined. At Khanjara, where Desmond had stayed a night hoping for word from Azruli, it had come as a blow to hear that the telegraph wires were down; but since there had been a severe sandstorm two days before that had worked a good deal of havoc for miles around, neither he nor his host—the officer in charge of the small garrison—paid much heed to it.

“Everything is quieting down,” the latter had said cheerfully. “We’ve had hell’s own time, but now it’s really pretty well all right. I get reports from a widish area, and there’s been absolutely no trouble of a serious nature. If there’d have been anything much brewing I should have heard of it. You’ll get there in a couple of days or so.”

So Desmond started out for distant Azruli, with his small cavalcade, consisting of Captain Rochelle—a French officer, Hargood, an Arab guide, two baggage camels, and half a dozen friendly Arabs, also mounted and well armed, for though it was necessary to have some guard against the robbers that infested the country, it was also advisable to avoid any appearance of warlike design.

The Arabs were picked men, they understood that they were to go to Azruli and bring back a sick Englishman to Khanjara, and since they were to be well paid for only short service, they were quite

content. So they rode out of Khanjara in the dry blaze of the summer morning, and Desmond thanked his stars he was away from the damp, exhausting heat of the Gulf, and entering upon the last stage of his journey.

Captain Lee's cheery dismissal of trouble should have convinced him, but, despite such reassurances, he felt a little disturbed, though why, he did not know. Lee would, of course, get word at once if anything should be amiss; there was no evidence of brewing trouble around; everything was as he had said, and yet, deep in Desmond's mind remained a sense of uneasiness. He cursed himself for an imaginative fool as he rode on through the clear sunshine beside the padding, lurching camel, and soon was forced to give his attention to the track rather than his own thoughts, for the so-called road disappeared altogether as they neared the Khanjara Hills, as, not long before nightfall, after an arduous day, they reached the head of the pass, and were advised by their Arab Guide to make this their camp.

Desmond would have wished to push on, but he realised that here, at least, despite the cold, they were in a good position for to-morrow's start, that the spring, bubbling from the rocks close by, provided all that was necessary for man and beast, and that Bahram knew very much better than he did the difficulties of the road ahead.

So the tents were put up, the camels tethered,

and food prepared by Bahram, the cook, who was an excellent individual, with a fine war record; and, about ten, Desmond rolled himself in a blanket, and prepared to sleep. Just as he was sinking into a pleasing drowsiness, he felt a hand pluck at his sleeve, and starting up, on his elbow, beheld Hargood on hands and knees beside him, vaguely seen in the starlight.

"Hullo, what's up?" he demanded, in a cautious undertone, and Hargood slipped down till he was crouching close beside him. "Seen anything wrong?"

"Not exactly, m'lord, but I'm not altogether easy in my mind. I thought I'd see if your lordship——"

"Drop that!" Desmond commanded, still below his breath, but none the less peremptorily. "We're not in that world now. What's the matter?"

With a little sigh of relief, Hargood stretched out his legs, and leant against the rocky ledge that sheltered them from the night wind.

"Well, it's like this, sir," he said, slowly. "I know Captain Lee thinks everything's all right, and I know he ought to get word, but all the same I don't feel easy. What's this Agha so mighty careful about these last few hours if everything's as all right as is supposed? Look here, sir, have you noticed that since we left the plain he's been keeping a pretty sharp look-out?"

Desmond nodded.

"Yes. That's true. Go on."

"Well, I was behind you with the other johnnies and I noticed one of 'em point to something right away over the desert. I looked, but I couldn't see anything, and I noticed that they all drew close up and put baggage camels in the middle, and hurried the pace a bit till we got into the rocks and hidden. Now it mayn't be anything, and then again it may. What do *you* think about it, sir?"

Desmond lifted himself cautiously into a more comfortable position.

"What's your opinion of him?" he asked, by way of reply.

"Agha? Not a bad sort of feller for a nigger."

"You'd better not let him hear you call him a nigger," Desmond said. Hargood designated everybody but a pure white as "nigger." "He fought well for us, and it's quite an honour that he's acting as guide."

Hargood sniffed cautiously.

"We'll see what he's up to to-morrow, anyway," was his reply. "They've got a sentry posted."

Desmond, who was decidedly sleepy after the day, discouraged any further conversation by lying down again, and Hargood slid off to his blanket, a yard or two away.

They awoke just as the dawn was breaking, in a pale lilac that changed swiftly to flame and gold, and after a hasty meal, started once more on their

journey westward down the next difficult few miles of rocky trail.

Just before they emerged into the open desert, Agha signed to the others to halt, and, dismounting, he left the shelter of the rocks, creeping cautiously to a high vantage-point, where, lying behind a ridge, he swept the horizon with his eagle glance.

Hargood watched him uneasily, Desmond with interest; he knew something of Arabs in general, and a good deal of this Arab in particular. Their guide was not a guide; he was a nomad Arab, head of an influential tribe in the desert, and a wealthy man. He had appeared at Khanjara unexpectedly, riding at the head of a little cavalcade of Arabs mounted on camels. The racing, keen-eyed, splendid men, wearing flowing white robes, and carrying curved scimitars, the Agha himself bearing aloft a green silk flag that streamed out in the cool morning breeze. Desmond had watched them with interest, and that interest had deepened when his host sent for him, and he found the flag-bearer standing in the centre of the small room. Captain Lee had made them acquainted in a few brief words.

"Lord Desmond, this chieftain is my friend Kaleh-av-din, grandson of the Agha of Karn, and himself Agha of Angoul. He knows your brother and the English Consul with whom he is staying at Azruli, he has offered to take you there with his own escort. He speaks French and English."



The Arab bowed, and shook the hand Desmond held out, and Desmond liked the keen, bold glance that swept him from head to foot, and then studied his face. There was a nobility about this nomad Arab, a brilliant intelligence and a certain grave beauty that was refreshing after the weakly Persian and less handsome Kurds.

Before he left the house, he had gained a great deal of information, and arranged the details of his journey to Azruli, the result being that he was now riding a beautiful mare down a villainously bad path on the way to Easton.

The morning was rapidly becoming hot, although being eight hundred feet above the sea level, they were also above the steaming heaviness of the Gulf; still the sun was powerful, and on the wide plain below the Khanjara Hill there was not the slightest shade.

Behind them rose the stony hills they had just crossed, around them a broad stretch of bare country, marked here and there with the ruins of villages, seamed with the furrows of cultivation, yet empty of so much as a blade of grass or a leaf from a tree: for everywhere the locust had swarmed, stripping the land to its skeleton, turning what had shortly before been a pleasant, well-cultivated, and fruitful countryside into an empty desert.

The heat increased as noontide approached, till the earth seemed red hot torment, reflecting the

blaze of the skies, and Desmond, not yet acclimatised, found the ride was little short of a nightmare. He rode beside the Agha, and the Agha shot him more than one keen, scrutinising glance, as they pushed on across the lonely country. They camped beside the ruins of a canal, and ate a hasty meal, a sentry being posted on a little rock; and as soon as it was over, the Agha gave the order to push on. The haste was so marked that presently he turned to his companion and put a direct question to him, to be answered by another of the keen, bold glances, that in the first place had attracted him to the Arab.

"You ask if there is need for hurry?" the Arab echoed. "And I say, Excellency, that there is need, if we would show ourselves men of wisdom."

Desmond frowned.

"What is wrong?" he demanded. "I thought Major Lee said the country was quiet?"

"Yes, Excellency, it is quiet," was the reply he received. "But it is not wise to loiter on the road. There are robbers always abroad and troubles always to face. Also the way is arduous."

Desmond accepted the explanation, although he knew quite well it was not a true one, and very soon ceased to trouble about anything but his own increasing discomfort, for the heat and glare was terrific, and the going exceedingly hard. Toward sunset, the dreary stretch of going across the plain came to an end, and the little caravan to a halt

beside a river flowing through a rocky gorge in a swift yellow torrent, that seethed and swirled around the rocks in a manner anything but reassuring.

Everybody dismounted, and began to talk and gesticulate. Desmond, who was only too thankful to dismount, occupied himself with walking down to the water's edge, and throwing himself down to rest his aching limbs and watch the boiling torrent.

Presently, Rochelle came up to him, and, taking out his pipe, sat down close by.

"This is the Khantan ford," he said, nodding in the direction of the water. "But it appears there has been a bad storm or two in the Hills, and the river's in flood. It's a pretty bad place anyhow, at least so I've found. But it's a good deal worse than ever I've seen it."

"What are we going to do, then?" Desmond enquired; but for his anxiety to reach Easton he would have been quite content to delay the crossing till the river should return to its normal level, so sore and aching was he from head to foot.

"We've to meet some Kurds from the Kurdish village over there"—again came the jerk of the head—"who are under contract to bring some mules and take the camels in exchange. That is till we return from Azruli. You know camels hate water, and the country beyond is not fit for them, so here we shall transfer the baggage to mules. Yes. I thought so. Here they come!"



A yell from one of the Arabs made Desmond jump as Rochelle finished speaking and, looking around, he saw coming down the sandy slope they had recently traversed a party of horsemen and mules, which party was greeted riotously by the Arabs of his own little contingent, and there ensued a general and pleasing commotion.

Darkness fell before the transfer of the baggage from camels to mules had been accomplished, and the Agha announced that camp must be pitched for the night on this side of the river, since in its present state of flood it was impossible to ford it after dark. It was also said that no fires must be lit on account of possible robbers; and, as a sharp wind blew off the water with nightfall, the prospect was not particularly cheerful.

Desmond and Rochelle talked in undertones over such food as they could get, cold, and Desmond learned that Azruli was a small town with, since the war, a British resident, a French garrison—"One captain, a sergeant, and half a dozen men"—and one or two representatives of enterprising businesses, both French and English. Altogether, the Christian population numbered about twenty, including women and children, and was not an enviable spot, being considerably dirtier than even the usual dirty towns abounding in this part of the world. Desmond enquired of the state of the country, quoting what Lee had said, and Rochelle shrugged his shoulders.



"Nothing is really settled," he said. "It's all in the melting pot. The Turks are only waiting to give trouble, and these Kurds and Armenians are a rotten lot. I'd rather have the Turk any day, myself. He's got some rather fine qualities, and as a soldier he's heroic. He's got a stubborn sense of duty that's unequalled. . . . I'm sorry Fate has thrown them into the scale against us. The nomad Arab is a fine fellow, too, faithful, heroic and picturesque . . . they're moral, too, and clean-living, quite untouched with the vices of the Persian and the town-dwelling Arab. The Kurds are by no means fools, but they're so covetous that they have to rob, and it's Kurdish bands that we want to avoid now."

Desmond nodded, and they talked for a while about the country and its problems, the Oriental dislike of personal interference, their preference for being let alone sooner than improved, their complete acceptance of things as they are, and their bitter resentment should any Government attempt to make them as they should be.

Desmond had served in Palestine, but not in Arabia or Mesopotamia, and he was deeply interested in Rochelle's conversation, which lasted till well into the night; then cold, and anything but comfortable, they rolled themselves in blankets and slept, and the last sound in Desmond's ear was the wail of the wind, bearing on its breast the yelping cry of a jackal.

With daylight and sunrise, the gloomy rocks and surging river took on a less depressing air, and Hargood boiled coffee over a Tommy's cooker, and served his master and M. le Capitaine with quite a good breakfast, sorely enough needed. Then the Agha came up to them and spoke to Rochelle in a quick undertone. Rochelle listened, then in his turn spoke to Desmond:

"The Agha says the Herki band are doubling back towards Zabir," he said. "One of the muleteers has brought news. So he says we must get across at once and push on."

"How?" Desmond enquired, laconically. "Swim?"

Rochelle laughed.

"Not quite. There'll be a little ten-skin *kellek over in a minute. Look!"

Desmond looked, and sure enough, across the river came a little raft built of skins; and, quite expecting to be upset, he followed Rochelle's example and embarked, to arrive safely on the other side after a perilous ten minutes, during which time the raft pitched and twisted and danced about like a thing possessed. Then came the task of getting the horses and mules over, which task the Kurds, who had arrived the night before, proceeded to accomplish with a skill and courage that was amazing.

They stripped, got on to the horses barebacked,

* Raft.

and rode them straight into the boiling flood; the horses walked in up to their bellies, then plunged into deeper water and were spun round in the swirling rush of the waters, sometimes disappearing for seconds, to emerge still fighting and struggling for the shore. Even the muleteers were over-awed by the task, and stood by, watching with eyes starting out of their heads and murmuring:

"Bismallah!" "Mashallah!" "Ya ibn Dawud!" and the like exclamations, evidently believing each second to see the whole company drowned.

However, every horse and mule was got safely across, and both Desmond and Rochelle saw to it that such a gallant action did not go unrewarded, while Hargood slapped one amazed Kurd on his bare brown back, and stated what he thought of the matter in good nervous Cockney.

Three days later, crawling down a rocky defile over an appallingly bad track if track it could be called, the cavalcade came in sight of Azruli, a small walled town, with mountains to the north and east, and a vast uneven plain stretching away to the confines of the Arabian desert on the south and west. As they approached the town more nearly they reached a road, or what did duty as such, and came across a little group of people surrounding a dilapidated carriage from which two miserable horses had been unharnessed.

Instantly curious Rochelle's little party pulled up, and Desmond, who knew a little of the language from his Palestine days with Arabs during the war, was regaled by the discussion that was taking place between the coachman of the carriage, the occupants, and a dignified bearded individual who seemed to have been fetched from the town, and was apparently the owner.

"Is this the carriage of Hadji Mohammed?" demanded the driver, waving one arm towards the wreck with the gesture of a tragedian.

The bearded one bowed.

"Even so, O Abdullah, son of Ahmed. What would ye?"

"What would I? What would I?" Abdullah's voice rose shrilly. "Is it meet that I am sent to meet high lords and great, with a carriage that falls to pieces when the horses move? Behold the string beneath! Behold the ends where it snapped! Am I a dog to be treated so? Am I to sit by the roadside and watch the great lords ride by?"

The bearded one shrugged.

"Is it I who hired the carriage? Wake not the mountains with thy ill-timed clamour."

"I wake the mountains? I wake the mountains?" Abdullah shrieked. "Listen to the thrice-cursed son of a dog who sends out a carriage thus!"

"Cease thy clamour, blight! Pig, and son of a

pig, be silent! What is it to thee if the carriage break down? It is not thy body lying in the road!"

Here one of the occupants of the carriage in question took a hand.

"The carriage is cursed!—may Allah blast you both, and your religion, and your affairs, your town, and your wives. May Allah——"

Another spectator, clad in uniform, pushed aside the speaker and addressed the coachman.

"Thou art a fool! Send for another carriage!"

Gurgling with indignation the coachman turned upon him.

"I a fool!"

"Ay, truly, the son of fools, and the father of fools!"

"You lie, and you shall be accursed!"

"I am a soldier of the great Emperor. Would you say that the soldiers of the Emperor are fools?"

"Would you have me say that you are a thief? Who sold me the oats this morning of short weight?"

The soldier collapsed and retreated, and Desmond did likewise in unseemly laughter, and rode on down to the walls of Azruli.



CHAPTER XXIV

A WEEK later Desmond stood alone on the rocky road leading east from Azruli, where it led from the heart of the little city past the castle—a dilapidated yet sturdy structure—and away towards distant Baghdad.

He had been all day with his brother, and had come out now towards sunset for some exercise and fresh air, the latter a vitally necessary thing in Azruli, where all the putrescent odour of the east seemed to mingle and magnify. Now, as he stood above the town, the smell and the dirtiness and the squalor vanished, and only the picturesque aspect remained.

The cup-like hollow, where the town lay, was already in shadow, but just above, to the north, the slope to the lower hills lay bathed in sunshine, which turned the low grey olive trees to amber, and softened all the hard angles of wall and rock. To the south, the river meandered like a ribbon of silver light amidst the arid stony wastes, till it was lost in the purple haze of the distant desert, and above all, the rampart of snow-capped mountains flushed rose-pink, lifted their tumbled summits against a sky of pure gold.



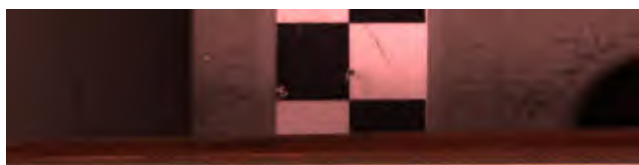
Desmond stood watching, with eyes remote and lips compressed; the beauty and lonely grandeur of the scene could not but impress him, but it was not the sunset glory that kept him standing there, leaning against a rock and gazing into the far-off splendour of the western sky.

The day just over, hot and terrible in the oppressive squalor of the town, marked the close of an epoch in his life, and had brought him face to face with a possibility that he had never seriously contemplated—that of his brother's death.

Even in the first weeks of anxiety he had refused even to think that Easton might not recover, but now it was impossible to blind himself to the truth.

Since his arrival at Azruli he had never left him, except to take enough exercise for health, and he had steadfastly refused to acknowledge Easton's ever-growing weakness and lassitude. He had told himself it was the heat, the poor food, the discomfort—any and everything, but the truth; and now that there was no longer any possibility of self-deception, he suffered all the more keenly.

Between the two brothers there had been a tie of family affection and mutual personal liking, even though the intense love, that sometimes exists in such relationship, was not present. Desmond had respected his brother, as all who knew Easton did respect him, and since his own affairs had so gone awry, that liking and respect



had deepened and strengthened. During the few weeks they had been together a certain comradeship had sprung up between them, and, unconsciously, Desmond had begun to treat his brother as a friend. Since his arrival at Azruli he had been tireless in his service, exerting every power of mind and body to ease Easton's discomfort, and help him gain strength; Easton had leaned on his strength, and Desmond devoted himself night and day to his care.

Only a few hours ago the blow had fallen in the shape of an acute attack of vertigo, the symptom which the army surgeon, who had treated him before leaving with the troops, had dreaded, and definitely pronounced to be the beginning of the end.

Desmond had been told of this fear, and now that the fear had become a fact he realised that every line of Easton's wasted face and form, every look and movement emphasised and proved the truth of the surgeon's verdict.

The unclouded gold of the west was slowly changing to rose and amber when at last he moved and began walking slowly once more towards the town; Easton would be needing him, he must get back, and, with bitterness in his heart, he retraced his steps to the foul-smelling town below.

A few hundred yards from the walls he met his host, the British resident, Hammond, a pleasant, shrewd, sunburned man, doing his duty, without

question, in the exceedingly unpleasant place wherein it lay.

On seeing Desmond he quickened his pace and came up to him, and instantly the fear in Desmond's heart leapt to his lips.

"Easton? He's not worse?"

"No. No. He was asleep when I came out a minute ago," Hammond answered quickly. "I came up after you. The Agha told me he'd seen you coming up this road some time ago, and I came after you. It's not particularly healthy outside the town after sunset—or about it either."

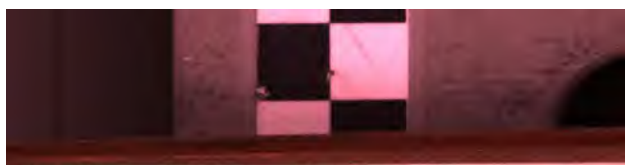
"It's certainly not particularly healthy inside!" Desmond retorted. "You've no enviable job here, Hammond. Shan't you be glad when you get transferred?"

Hammond laughed, shortly.

"Transferrerd? My dear Harbyn, there won't be much transfer for me this side heaven. Unless the Turks rise in their might and wipe us out."

"I should have thought the Arabs were more likely to do that," Desmond said, as they picked their way down the stony path. "The Agha seemed extremely anxious on the way here. What has happened to the raiders we were supposed to be evading—or were they a figment of the good man's brain?"

"Certainly they were not. The Herki band are a body of considerable power, and by no means enemies to be despised, but from all accounts



they've ridden off to the south, so they probably won't trouble us. But all the same one never knows in this part of the world."

Desmond nodded. The deadly monotony of life at Azruli was beginning to tell on his nerves, and the inaction drove him mad with longing to be back in England, within reach of Pauline.

They had reached the house on the walls, where Hammond lived—part of the ancient, yet serviceable fort, that was still called the Castle—and at the threshold Mrs. Hammond met them, her kindly face full of distress.

"Oh, Robert—oh, Lord Desmond, I'm so glad you're back!" she exclaimed, in a rapid undertone, "Lord Easton has been awake for the last half-hour, and he's suffering great pain."

"Pain?" Hammond echoed, as Desmond looked at him with sullen bitterness. "Harbyn, Collier told me that he's bound to suffer pain—but he didn't know when it might begin . . . it's damnable . . . and we can do nothing."

He broke off abruptly, and Desmond pushed past him and went to the room where his brother was, and closing the door behind him crossed over to the low iron bedstead where Easton lay.

Worn to a shadow, so pale that his face looked absolutely bloodless, the lines of suffering already beginning to appear about eyes and mouth, Easton lay propped up a little against the poor pillows, his eyes turned towards the door, his breath

coming in short gasps. As he saw Desmond a quiver of pleasure crossed his face, and his soft dark eyes lit up.

"Desmond . . . my dear, how good it is to know you're here! I was trying to realise it . . . it's fine."

He broke off rather abruptly, the smile fixed on his ashen face, and Desmond went quickly to the bedside.

"Easton . . . you're in pain. Can't I get you something?" He bent down, taking his brother's limp hand in his, but in answer to his question Easton only signed a negative, and lay very still, breathing quickly through open lips, dilated eyes fixed on the opposite wall, the perspiration breaking out on his forehead in great drops. At the sight of that onslaught of pain, Desmond's face went as white as Easton's was grey, and dropping on his knees by the bed, he held his brother's hand between his own, powerless to relieve the suffering, wild and bitter resentment surging in his heart that Easton should be in agony, and he, well and strong beside him and unable to lift one finger to relieve that agony.

He had witnessed it before; the attacks had, the last few days, become more frequent and of longer duration, and Easton had shown less rallying power. The dizziness that Collier, the army-surgeon, had feared, marked a further stage in the disease set up by the wound, and Desmond

knew, as he knelt beside him, that the end was only a matter of time.

Outwardly, he was calm and quiet as he knelt there, but inwardly, he was on fire with revolt and desperation at his utter helplessness.

Collier had left a tiny phial of morphia tablets behind him, but there were only a few doses, and he had warned Hammond to keep them in reserve for the last agonies, should the wound develop as he feared, and this Desmond knew; and as the hours passed and the pain abated somewhat, allowing Easton to drop into a light sleep of exhaustion, the horror of the position became fully apparent. Easton was dying because circumstances were such that no surgical aid was procurable, and the stark, hideous fact, that here was a life going out in agony which might have possibly been saved, stared him in the face, and would not be softened. He thought of the surgeon's statement which Hammond had repeated to him.

Easton had been too ill and exhausted when carried into Azruli for the regimental surgeon to dare to remove the bullet that had lodged in the right occipital lobe of the brain; the operation would, at any time, have been one of extreme risk, and in Easton's state would have been undoubtedly fatal, but Collier had stated that two results might occur from the wound being left as it was. The brain might become accustomed to the bullet



and tolerate it as a foreign body, so long as no movement displaced it, there being no splinters in or around the wound. He might, with complete rest, entirely recover. On the other hand, should the symptoms prove unfavourable, dizziness would begin to be noticeable, the attacks of neuralgic pain would increase in severity, with a certain amount of fever, and finally convulsions would supervene.

Hammond's words came to Desmond now, as he sat in the comfortless room, watching the doomed man.

"Collier admitted that if your brother was in a hospital in a civilised country instead of an Arabic village there would be little fear of the case taking the wrong turn. It would be possible to build up his strength, choose a favourable time and operate, so obviating the risk of infection supervening. But as it is, if any unfavourable turn is taken, he's doomed . . . unless a miracle sends a brilliant surgeon to Azruli in time to take the risk."

To Desmond it seemed a monstrous thing that Easton should die through lack of a surgeon's skill, and more monstrous still that he should lie there and suffer hideously before death came. He had always accepted the general principles of the religion in which he had been educated, but, like most people, had never applied them to his life, which was governed more by the traditional code

of the class to which he belonged than by any real belief in the teachings of Christianity. He was amazed, therefore, now, to find springing up in his heart a fierce resentment against a Creator who could thus permit a human being to be tortured for no reason; from negative acceptance he passed, for the time being, not only into active belief, but into active hatred. He sat there, helpless with black rage at his heart, and, as if his revolt of spirit disturbed the atmosphere, the sick man stirred, sighed heavily, and opened his eyes. Instantly, Desmond was close beside him, and Easton spoke slowly, as if the effort tried him.

"What time is it?"

By the light of the candle Desmond looked at his watch.

"Four o'clock," he said. "I'll get you something"; but Easton stopped him.

"No, don't. I'd rather talk a little."

"Won't it tire you too much?" Desmond asked, doubtfully, and his brother smiled.

"No. Besides, if it did——Desmond, I've meant to ask you . . . I asked Hammond, but he lied . . . dear fellow. What did that army doctor say about me?"

"He said there was every chance for your recovery if you kept absolutely quiet and regained your strength."

"Which I'm not doing—and this dizziness?"



I have an idea he said that was a bad sign . . . tell me the truth, dear fellow. I . . . I think I know it. I'm dying. Isn't that so?"

Desmond's hands clenched.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely. "The dizziness and the pain means the beginning of the end . . . so that man said. If they could have operated then they might have saved you, but you were too weak; and if, a few days ago, there had been a good surgeon here, he might have extracted the bullet even then, but now infection has set in. That is what they have told me."

Easton lay still a moment, looking unseeingly at the opposite wall. Then he turned his head towards his brother. His face was pale and drawn, but the eyes were bright, and the mouth smiled; it was almost as though he had received good news, and Desmond was amazed.

"Thank you," he said, and reached out his hand towards his brother. "It's . . . good to know the truth. Don't look like that, Desmond . . . it's no shock to me. Just one more question . . . will there be much pain. . . ah! you needn't answer."

He was silent again for a moment, then looked once more at his brother.

"I guessed it," he said. "And I want you to promise me something."

"I'll do anything I can," Desmond said, gently.



"Anything. But you oughtn't to talk so much, it may bring the pain back."

Easton made a little gesture of assent.

"Never mind if it does. There are one or two things that I must say . . . and this may be my last chance. I want you to promise not to give me the morphia . . . Collier left . . . unless I'm becoming a nuisance to anybody round me. I don't want it unless that happens."

"Don't want it?" Desmond echoed. "Easton, why?"

"Because I want to keep my mind clear. I want to realise what's going to happen to me, to put my house in order . . ."

Desmond felt the anger rising again within him, and its reflection was hard in his voice as he spoke.

"Why should you suffer?" he said, violently. "What good does your suffering do? Why should you lie here in agony, when that agony is needless? It's not just, let alone merciful! It's damnable!"

A shadow passed over Easton's face; for a minute or two he lay silent, as if gathering his forces; then, slowly at first, but gaining strength as he proceeded, he began to speak.

"Desmond," he said, "we've never discussed the real things of life . . . I suppose habit kept us back . . . I've never known whether you had faith in God or not . . . it's not the way of our race to talk about these things . . .

I shouldn't now . . . only . . . they are the only things that matter now, to me. You say it's not just or merciful for me to suffer . . . I feel differently. To me, suffering is one of our chief means of expiation . . . for ourselves and for others . . . if I can suffer patiently, it may be that I can, perhaps, pay part of another's debt."

He paused a moment, then smiled at his brother.

"Do I sound conceited? I'm not that . . . but this is my firm belief, and as such I give it to you as an answer to your question."

"You mean that you consider suffering is necessary for all of us? That it's our payment of a debt?"

"Yes. Some people can't stand it . . . to them it's an unbearable torture . . . so those who can ought to bear it for them. Do you see what I mean, dear fellow?"

Desmond nodded.

"Yes. But to me it appears monstrous. Why should you think that? What makes you think it?"

Easton drew a quick breath; the first stabbing pain of another attack warned him that he was over-taxing his strength, but he longed passionately to say what was in his mind. Thankful for the dim light, that left his face partly in shadow, he forced himself to ignore the warning.

"That's the whole secret of Christ's teaching," he said. "He bore our burdens and told us to

bear one another's . . . and it seems to me that physical or mental agony, willingly borne, may perhaps help to atone for those who cannot, or will not, bear it for themselves. It seems to follow on what He taught . . . and, after all, that's the only thing that matters . . . one sees that so clearly when it's only a question of a few hours, or days at most, before one goes to Him."

There was a swelling in Desmond's throat that made speech difficult; and, as if Easton knew it, he did not wait for any remark, but went on, though with more difficulty:

"I believe Death is the last and greatest act of expiation that we make . . . I believe that Death courageously met wipes out much of our guilt before God . . . it is a punishment for sins, and punishment willingly and humbly borne merits forgiveness . . . and after all it's so little . . . pain and Death . . . think what it leads to! I know how you feel about my suffering . . . I've seen it . . . and I want you to try to look at it differently. You've been angry and bitterly resentful . . . you've felt you hated God if there was a God . . . for permitting it . . . but that's all wrong . . . and lying here, knowing I'm going to see Him . . . perhaps before another night . . . the things that perplex and worry one are so different. Desmond . . . try to feel as I do . . . try to understand . . . it's not cruelty . . .



it's love . . . all the way . . . every moment . . . I've felt that all my life . . . and all my life I've longed to see Him . . . and now it's so near I feel that no pain, no suffering matters one little bit . . . if it hastens one's approach to Him . . . makes one a little more fit to see Him, a little more like Him. So if . . . if it's very bad . . . remember that, won't you? And . . . unless I don't know what I'm doing . . . and . . . become a nuisance . . . don't drug me. Let me go right through to the end . . . so that if my belief is right . . . I may help . . . some one else."

His voice died away in a whisper of utter fatigue, and Desmond, choking, tried to answer him. His own anger and bitterness was stilled, it could not live in the face of his brother's words; and all through the dreadful hours that followed, those words, and all they meant, passed and repassed through his mind. If this were true, if it were a fact, that no man could act without that action in some way impinging upon his neighbour, if every movement of the soul, whether it be backward or forward, re-acted upon the souls of his fellow-men, then the responsibility was, indeed, tremendous.

And in those hours, Desmond faced his own soul in the light of Easton's belief, and found it wanting.



CHAPTER XXV

EASTON lingered a week, during which he was for the most part in the grip of agony that gradually gave way as his strength failed, to prolonged periods of semi-consciousness; and on Sunday, six days after the conversation between himself and Desmond, he died, passing from sleep to coma and from coma to death, without a struggle.

They buried him that night, just by the castle; Hammond read the burial service over the unmarked grave, and when the brief ceremony was over, Desmond sought Rochelle.

"I must start for Baghdad first thing in the morning," he said. "My father will be waiting for news. Can you make arrangements with the Arabs for me, or shall I ask Hammond?"

"I will see the Agha," Rochelle said. "But you must talk to Hammond, too. I think all is not so well in the country; he will tell you."

Hammond was looking through an Arabic message, brought in by a fierce-looking Bedouin, when Desmond entered the room, and the latter would have retreated, but Hammond signed to him to remain.

"Don't go, Harbyn . . . where's Rochelle?"



"Just left the house. Do you want him? I'll fetch him." Glad of something to occupy him, he went out, caught up Rochelle and brought him back to Hammond's office. There they found the Bedouin gone, and the British resident alone; Rochelle was the first to speak.

"What is it? Bad news?"

Hammond nodded; his face was flushed and stern, his manner brusque.

"Yes. The Shendar tribe has risen and is marching on Azruli. They have sacked Tar-el-far. Mohammed ben-Ali rode at the risk of his life to warn us. Harbyn, find Captain Dean, send him to me, then warn the people. Rochelle, make the best arrangements you can in so short a time."

Desmond waited to hear no more but ran out, found Dean and sent him to Hammond, then went on, down the filthy, uneven apology of a street, to the warehouse of Messrs. Coutts & Brannigan, one of the British firms that has started branches in various towns of the near East; he found the place closed for the night, but knowing where the manager lived he quickened speed, and reached the house to find only the manager's wife, two children, and the old Scotch servant there. Not wishing to frighten them, yet realising that he must lose no time in warning the other white inhabitants, he told Mrs. Thompson that there was some rioting near the town, and the resident thought she had better bring her household to the



castle. Luckily, she was a sensible girl, and did not hinder him by questions; and promising to return shortly or send her husband, he made as swift a way as possible to that part of the town where Thompson was visiting the representative, whom a certain big store had sent from London with a view to trading dry goods with the Arabs.

He found the two men smoking and talking, told them his news in a few words, and leaving Mrs. Barlow frantically collecting a few things and Barlow urging her to hurry, he warned the handful of white employees and got them all shepherded to the castle, where rumour of the impending fight was rife.

There was little enough time to make any arrangements for defence; ammunition was scarce, there were but a score of soldiers, and how far the Arabs of the town might be trusted Hammond did not know; those few whom he could rely upon were already with him, and the intervening time between the news and the attack was spent in strengthening the defences by means of stones and hastily thrown-up earth. Just after nightfall, a distant yelling and shouting came on the still air, and Hammond, who was on the north of the castle, looked significantly at Desmond.

"That is the advance guard," he said. "They've entered the city, and we shall have no trouble till to-morrow. No Orientals ever attack in the early morning as we do. You'll not have



the 'attack at dawn' that we were all so used to not very long ago."

"You've not heard yet what the size of the attacking force is?" Desmond asked, trying to pierce the shadows in the direction of the city.

"No. But I soon shall. Come down to my office." Desmond left the walls and followed him—the castle was a small fort in fairly good repair, and standing at an elevation above the city, but it was ill-adapted for anything like a serious defence, and the soldiers knew well enough that the position was grave.

Hammond's office was built against the southern wall, and here he called a council of war, consisting of Desmond, Rochelle, Thompson, who was a capable young man of good sense, and Captain Dean, who was nominally in command of the whole affair, but in reality placed himself entirely under Hammond, who knew both the country and the people with whom he had to deal, which Dean, being a new-comer, did not.

They discussed the news which an Arab scout had brought in, and it was about as bad as it could be. The attacking force was well armed and numbered over a thousand men, and Hammond took the gravest possible view of the chance of successful defence.

"We'll fight to the end," he said grimly. "That goes without saying; but what I *must* say is this: when we know it's hopeless and we're done, we

must not let the women be taken prisoners. You understand? Save the last shot for them."

"Good God!" Barlow exclaimed, and Thompson's face worked.

"Shoot the women?" he said quickly.

"Yes. These Arabs are not nomads. If they were the women would be prisoners, but safe; but these are the bastard Arabs, and they'll take them into the harems—or worse. If there's no hope—you understand."

Barlow still protested wildly; Thompson swallowed desperately and gave his word, and Desmond said:

"I'm under your orders, Hammond," and tried to steady Barlow's shaken courage.

It was broad daylight before the first attack was made, and the little garrison fought gallantly; but from the very first Desmond realised that unless a miracle happened their case was hopeless; they were outnumbered twenty to one, and by men well-armed, and already experienced in fighting Europeans. The town had long since been taken, and shrieks and cries came faintly to the ears of the defenders.

The castle, despite its grand name, was merely a small fort, and might have been held for some days with an adequate force; but as it was, in a few hours the assailants were at the actual walls, and, regardless of the fire from the men within, were attempting to scale them.



Barlow was killed almost at the beginning of the fight, and Mrs. Barlow, crouching in a corner of Hammond's office, tried desperately to control her mingled grief and terror; and Gwen Thompson, who was a mere girl, took the dead man's rifle and joined the little group of men by the gate, which was the danger spot of the fort.

Towards sunset, Hammond, his arm tied up in a blood-stained bandage, dripping with sweat and grimed with dust, sought out Desmond, and found him lying behind a tumbled heap of brick loading and firing with the regularity of a machine, although his rifle was so hot he could scarcely hold it. Stooping, he gasped out his news.

"We're done. They'll be in in another few minutes. Harbyn—if you get away there's a mule-track, little used, across the mountains off to the right just before the white rocks near the head of the pass . . . make for it. Shimar lies away to the south-west . . . you'll be safe there . . . God . . . they're in!"

A crash of stones, yells, and a burst of firing: and then over the breach in the walls burst the attacking Arabs, wild-eyed fanatics waving their bloody scimitars—and even as they leapt down the broken wall, Mrs. Thompson rushed to the door of the office, uttered one cry, and stood transfixed in horror. Instantly two men darted at her with a shout of triumph, seized her, and pulled her towards the two Englishmen; the leading Arab



gave a wild shout and brandished his sword, whereupon the men behind him came to a standstill. Then advancing till he was close to Hammond, he spoke to the two men, who held Gwen Thompson's arms, loudly, so that all around could hear, and Hammond's face, beneath its blood and dust, went grey. He drew one quick breath between his teeth and flashed a look at Desmond.

"Shoot!" he said quickly, and even as the word passed his lips he whipped out his revolver and fired, and almost before she dropped, shot through the heart, there was a howling desperate mob; and Desmond, maddened by what he had seen, struck out with his fists in a fury that for a second paralysed his attackers by its very novelty.

But only for a minute. He was overwhelmed, borne down still struggling; then came a violent blow on his head, a blaze of light in his brain as of a million stars, and then darkness, impenetrable utter darkness, and he knew no more.

When he struggled back to consciousness his first thought was of the pain in his back; then, as sense gradually penetrated the black silence enwrapping his brain, he realised that he was lying across a sharp-edged stone, and slowly, with infinite difficulty, he opened his eyes.

For one awful moment he thought he was blind, for no light greeted him, and the shock roused him, as nothing else could, and brought back some recollection of what had happened; then far over-

head a tiny point of silver flickered and vanished, and he knew he could still see; and because he was half-stupefied he lay motionless, puzzled by the recurring and vanishing stars.

Then, suddenly from the darkness around him came a faint groan, and full realisation flashed in upon him. Cautiously, he moved one arm then the other, then his legs, then still more cautiously his head, and he found himself sore, aching and giddy, but intact.

He could hear nothing except those faint intermittent groans—wherever the Arabs were they were certainly not near-by, and very carefully he began to crawl in the direction of the sound. As his eyes became more accustomed to the light he saw he was in an angle of the castle wall, with stones and debris all around him, and overhead the stars hidden now and then by slowly-drifting veils of thin, grey smoke from burning ruins just beyond.

He found what he sought—a British soldier, judging by uniform; and as he touched him the man shuddered; whereupon Desmond, finding he was conscious, bent down and spoke in the lowest of whispers.

“It’s all right . . . where are you hurt?”

He heard a gasp, and in the faint light saw a grey blur that was a face, to his ear came a husky whisper.

“My shoulder—’ave you got a drink?”

Desmond felt for his flask—it was still intact, and with fumbling fingers he unscrewed it and held it where he judged the man's lips would be. He heard a gulp, a stifled oath that meant satisfaction, then after a minute, movements.

"Thanks, mate, that done me good!" whispered his unseen companion; and Desmond took a mouthful himself and felt the life surging back in his veins.

"They left me for dead," his companion was whispering. "If you can walk we'd better out of 'ere. Those beauties may be back to see if we're really done in."



CHAPTER XXVI

A FEARFUL sun blazing down from a heaven that seemed of white, hot brass, and beneath it the desert, vast, arid and lifeless, stretching as far as the eye could reach; the earth scorched and sand-coloured, cracked with the heat; the rocks bare and reflecting it—such was the sight Desmond looked upon this fifth morning of his escape from Azruli.

His companion, Williams by name, lay on the burning sand in a tiny patch of shade cast by a huge, upstanding rock; and he himself had climbed on to the ledge to scan the desert for some living creature.

Five days of incredible hardship had brought them in the direction of Baghdad, but Shimar, the friendly village of which Hammond had spoken, they had by some cruel mischance completely missed; and now, with no more food and only a little water, they found themselves still two days' journey from help.

Williams was a young Royal Fusilier, two or three years Desmond's junior, and during the last days the two had become intimate, each recognising in the other an unlooked-for unexpected grit and worth. Williams had a young wife, in Pad-

dington, and two small babies. Desmond had learned a good deal of that home in the grimy Arthur Street, and of Grace, Williams' wife.

He thought of her now and the portrait he had seen as he sat on the high ledge of rock shading his bloodshot eyes with his hand, and gazing out over the blinding sand; that exhausted youngster lying in the shadow behind him meant the worth of the world to her, and as such she must get him back. Somewhere over there in the brazen East lay Baghdad and safety . . . for one.

Desmond knew to a fraction the amount of water remaining in the felt-covered bottle, and he knew, too, the distance to be travelled. There was food and water for one—not enough for comfort, but just enough to keep life present; they had been resting here while Williams slept, for he needed sleep after the extra ration Desmond had served out to him, but soon he must be wakened, and then——

Desmond's tired eyes no longer saw the heat shimmering above the sand or the brazen sky above. Instead, they saw Pauline's face and her eyes smiling into his, and in his ears was the sound of Pauline's voice as he had last heard it—and always the thought of her love and her belief in him was present in his soul. It had upheld him through these dreadful days, it upheld him now, even though his whole spirit cried out in passionate yearning for one more meeting before he faced the



inevitable end. But not for an instant did the purpose weaken that he had formed when he found himself safely outside Azruli. The chance to make good had come, the opportunity to prove himself not altogether unworthy of the great love that had come into his life was before him, and he took it thankfully, even gladly.

Pauline's love for him had lifted him from selfishness and worthlessness to a higher level of effort; and Easton's dying words had revealed the meaning of that love to him, and had shown him that the love and tenderness of Pauline was but the reflection of a love and tenderness infinitely greater and more complete.

Pauline had first shown him the meaning of life and its beauty. The stern discipline of the last few days had revealed to him a vision of its ultimate and exquisite fulfilment as the God who gave it, designed. Worn out and tormented in body, he realised, nevertheless, that he was being offered a last great gift—the gift of supreme self-sacrifice; and rising, he climbed down from the rock and went round to its other side. Williams lay there, still sleeping the heavy sleep of exhaustion, and Desmond waited a moment before waking him to examine the contents of the water bottle. There was very little of the precious stuff—the very sight of it, tepid and stale as it was, roused a fury of thirst, and seemed to dry his already parched and swollen throat—even with good going Williams

would have a desperate time, and he must not sleep any longer. Bending down, Desmond roused him, and he sat up blinking.

"Time for you to push on," Desmond said. "Get up."

"All right." Williams was the type that thrives upon a discipline that, removed, would swell the army of the inefficient. "I'm ready. Come on—'Ere, what the 'ell are you doing?" The question was rapped out in a totally different voice, and its cause was Desmond's action in strapping the water bottle on to his belt and slipping the remaining little packet of food into his pocket.

Desmond jerked his head towards the east.

"You've got to go on by yourself," he said hoarsely, because his tongue was so swollen and his throat so dry that speech was difficult. "Keep that pile of rocks on the horizon just to your left. See it? Eleven o'clock . . . and push on after it as straight south as you——"

Williams interrupted him with a burst of profanity, ending with:

"And if you think I'm goin' to do the dirty and clear out with the water, I bloody well won't!"

Desmond paused a moment to try and swallow. He felt as if every drop of moisture in his body was dried up.

"Don't be—a dam' fool," he said at last. "You're only wasting my chances as well as your own. Go on to Baghdad—you may hit Jidah if



you get too far north. And come back for me. I shall follow on to those rocks."

But Williams was not silenced, and Desmond shook him by the shoulder.

"I am your superior officer, and I order you to go," he said, then added less formally. "D'you think I imagine you like doing it? Of course not—but if the worst comes to the worst, well, you've got Grace and the kiddies—you've no right to forget her—now—are you going, or shall I kick you off?"

Williams subsided, muttered something and turned away; then he paused irresolutely, swung back, and took the hand Desmond held out.

"You're game, you are——" he said hoarsely. "I'm comin' back for you——"

They bade each other a brief and none the less sincere farewell, then Williams turned away and began his plodding tramp into the red hot south. Desmond watched him till he was a mere speck in the quivering heat-haze, then he staggered round to the shady side of the rock and dropped down on the sand, exhausted.

What those last few minutes had cost him he had not realised till now; and as he lay there gasping and dizzy, he shrank in horror from what lay ahead.

Thirst . . . the torment of the desert . . . held him in its grip, and as the day wore on and the sun drew near the horizon, he began to doze,

dreaming always of cool meadows and running water that sparkled and danced all round him just out of reach. He would struggle back to dreadful consciousness to twist restlessly upon the sand, and stare with blood-shot, distended eyes at the brassy sky. Darkness brought some slight relief; but when the long, blazing day rose, the torture grew worse. Once he woke from a doze, where he had been lifting a great goblet of icy water to his lips, to find himself babbling nonsense; and for a while he could hear a harsh, grating noise going on that puzzled him, till regaining some degree of consciousness he realised it was his own voice.

Among the tangled dreams that whirled in his brain came one vision of Pauline's face as he had seen it last, and while that vision lasted he was quiet, even at peace; but always it passed in a dreadful phantasmagoria of sparkling water and licking, dancing flames that scorched and seared his tormented body.

Once he tried to rise, but could only get to his hands and knees, and after a vain effort, during which the whole world swayed and swung about him, he dropped again and lay still. Then later came a long period of mere physical agony when he was conscious of no mental existence at all, but that, too, passed; and suddenly a great quiet seemed to descend upon him, a quiet that stilled the hammering blood in his veins and soothed all the tortures of the awful thirst, and he heard his



name spoken aloud. Weakly, he tried to turn, saw a vague sweep of white garment, a light brilliant yet soft and healing, groped with his hands towards the Presence he knew was there—and when the merciful darkness crept across the sky, moved no longer, but lay very still in the shadow of the rock, his face upturned to the quiet stars.



CHAPTER XXVII

THE late October sunshine was flooding London, the skies were clear and blue, the parks brown after their long summer but still beautiful and in the squares and streets houses were once more re-opening and showing signs of life.

Out of his house in Berkeley Square, Lord Clere came and turned towards Piccadilly, still upright and fine to look at, yet with the elasticity gone from his step, the fire and life of splendid maturity from his eyes. He was unquestionably now a man approaching old age and only Eve appreciated quite what that meant to such a personality as his.

In the flood-tide of the afternoon traffic, he paused to cross the street and two people on the other side saw his tall figure waiting on the island, no other than Bella de Vauclin and her sister Hester, now Mrs. John Townsend, who were in town for a few days preparatory to the former's departure for New York.

It was Hester Townsend who recognised him first.

"Look, sister!" she said hurriedly, "There's the Marquis of Clere—Lord Desmond Harbyn's father. I met him a while ago at a political dinner."

"He's older than I thought," Bella de Vauclin



said, "Are you going to speak, Hester?" For Hester was deliberately waiting for him to cross the road.

"Yes. Good afternoon, Marquis. I surely am glad to meet you again."

Lord Clere, his thoughts far away, started abruptly at this greeting, looked for a moment bewildered, then, raised his hat and greeted the speaker, searching his memory for a clue to her identity. He need not have troubled, however, for Hester was quite ready to realise he had forgotten her.

"I'm Mrs. John Townsend," she said, "I had the pleasure of meeting you a few weeks ago at Mr. Bonar Law's house."

"Of course, of course," Lord Clere's tired eyes smiled down on the plain, eager little American. "You must forgive my momentary lapse of memory. I was thinking so deeply that I did not even realise my surroundings."

"I know!—My sister, the Baroness de Vauclin—Marquis, my sister—and I saw Lord Desmond when we were in Paris in April, and we've never seen him since. We'd both like to have him call. Where is he?"

The smile died out of Lord Clere's eyes, the lines in his face seemed suddenly to deepen; in a moment he looked all his age and in addition a very wearied, broken man.

"Desmond is in Arabia," he said slowly, "My

eldest son Easton was seriously wounded recently and Desmond has gone out to him. We are expecting news almost daily—have been doing so for several weeks, but communications are very uncertain.”

“Why, that’s bad.” Hester’s kindly voice expressed the sincere, quick sympathy of her nation. “I’m truly sorry. Where is Lord Easton?”

“Shut up in Azruli. Quite a small place some way west of Baghdad. Thank you for your interest.”

Bella here put in her word, keenly observing his face as he spoke.

“We’re adding to your worries by our questions,” she said, “but we’re both real friends of your son’s, and perhaps you would not find it tiresome to have a telephone message sent to my sister when news come through. Good-bye—and may it be good.”

“Most certainly,” Lord Clere shook hands more cordially than he was wont, reading the true feeling in their hearts, “I will do so with pleasure. Green Street, is it not? Good-bye, Mrs. Townsend. Good afternoon, Baroness.”

He went on westward leaving the two sisters to pursue their way to Dover Street and models, where in a certain noted shop they spent an extremely interesting couple of hours to come out just as the sun was setting in a bed of tiny flecks of rose-hued cloud.

“We’ll walk,” Bella de Vauclin declared, “But



let's go round and up Bond Street. I want to call at Asprey's to ask—Hester! Look!"

She stopped with a gasp and her face whitening, pointed at a news placard just exhibited by Dover Street Tube Station; its words were few; its lettering very clear:

"More trouble in Arabia. Town of Azruli taken by Arabs. Entire population massacred."

Eve Wilmot, driving to a bridge-party saw the placard and turned homeward, going straight to Berkeley Square, unable to believe what she had seen, but it was Raven Cardew who, seeing the fatal announcement jumped into a taxi and drove to the War Office for confirmation.

He need not have doubted. The news was brief but there was no room for doubt, and with its confirmation his thoughts flew to Pauline, and his heart sank.

He dreaded the thought of her seeing the news as he had seen it, as Lord Clere and Eve had seen it, had he but known, but almost equally he dreaded the idea of breaking it to her himself, of acting as executioner to his own sister, whom he had already hurt enough.

There was evensong to take at St. Peter's and afterwards a final interview with the Bishop—it was nearly half-past five now and he dared not wait. Miserably hoping that Pauline would re-

main indoors he drove rapidly to the church, feeling that his service must be perfunctory, to say the least, yet once inside the shadowy chancel, the only light that of the candles and the last of the sunset through the higher panes of the beautiful west rose-window, with the music stealing softly through the dimness, his wretchedness abated. The well-known oft-times scarcely-heeded words of the Office fell on the silence with pregnant meaning, and something odd, not comprehended, prompted Father Welby to add one more collect before the closing prayer of Saint Chrysostom and that collect one of the most perfect prayers ever prayed by man.

“Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, Who knowest our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking; we beseech Thee to have compassion upon our infirmities, and these things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us for the worthiness of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Was ever a cry more human uttered to a Divine Compassion?

Raven knelt on in his stall when the blessing had been given and the choir had departed, knelt till the verges hovering about the west doors went back into some corner of his own and sat down,



and Father Welby, divested of surplice and stole, with his overcoat ready buttoned over his cassock was about to leave the vestry.

All was very quiet. The steady roar of traffic did not penetrate through the great thickness of the walls, and in the rich shadowy dusk, where the red lamp above the high altar burned with a small steady radiance, Raven made his submission at last to his God.

For years he had worked and preached and served the altar, for years he had striven to repress every human desire and check every human impulse to happiness, for years he had devoted his energies, his health, his utmost zeal to the service of his Master, but not once had he laid down his pride. And before that Master's feet in the stillness of the great church he uttered anew the prayer that still rang in his ears:

“ ‘—Who knowest our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking; we beseech Thee to have compassion upon our infirmities—’ ”

It was dusk when he left the church at last, the violet star-strewn dusk of a golden autumn, the Bishop would be arriving at the Rectory and he must hurry; but as he walked, for the first time for many years he prayed with the certainty that he was heard, and entered his home with peace in his heart.

Billy met him in the hall.

"Have you seen Pauline—" he began, then seeing more clearly his brother's face, he stopped short. "Good God!" he said very softly, "Raven—what is it?"

Raven stopped.

"That is just it," he said as quietly as Billy had spoken, "God is good . . . I am going to see Pauline, but first I must see the Bishop. Telephone her, Billy, will you, and see that she waits at home," and with no other word he went on to the door that divided his wing of the house from the hall, leaving Billy staring after him.

Two hours later Pauline came into her little cream-panelled drawing room where four months ago she had said good-bye to Desmond, little knowing it was her last farewell, to find Raven standing by the fire, his hands clasped on the ledge of the little Adams mantelshelf, his head bent as he gazed into the flames and as he turned she spoke, longing as always to lighten the burden for others.

"Raven dear—don't be afraid to look at me. I know."



CHAPTER XXVII

THE winter came suddenly on the heels of a golden, breezy autumn, a winter of east winds, fogs and bitter rain, and after Christmas Pauline began to flag perceptibly.

For Desmond's sake she had played her part gallantly; to silence any possible gossip she had dressed as perfectly, gone about as much, smiled and talked as frequently as was her wont: but there is an end of all things, even of endurance and one cold raw day in the early New Year she went from one fainting-fit to another, till Eve, who had been having lunch with her, telephoned to her doctor. He came, sounded heart and lungs, asked a good many questions, gave some instructions and departed. Thereafter for a week or two Pauline obeyed orders and grew no better, and finally she was ordered to the South.

"San Remo, Cannes, Cap Martin, any of those places you like, but go you must. Take a villa and keep in the fresh air. No overheated rooms. Your heart won't stand it. No. There's nothing organically wrong but there will be if you go on like this . . . overstrain, general loss of vitality. You'll be an old woman before your time."

So Pauline went. There was no reason why she

should not, save that she had an odd distaste to leave the house in Little Clock Street for long. She clung to the memories it held, played with the fancy that one day she should see again her lover entering the rooms. She loved its quietude, its remoteness in the very heart of London; the Abbey chimes far up in the blue of summer days or the murkiness of winter nights were friends telling her that another hour had passed and she was that much nearer to reunion. The little street built in the days of the Stuarts with its dreamy air of long-ago, the sun which crept into the drawing room late in the afternoons, the moonlight which flooded the little panelled staircase—all and each recalled the past, whispered assurance for the far-off future—but never spoke of the present.

For weeks Pauline had suffered fiercely till she thought she must go mad; then exhausted nature began to utter a claim, and active agony had passed into a half-dreaming attitude of waiting, waiting, always waiting. And yet, sweetly reasonable, for the sake of those who loved her, she did as they wished, and one bitter February day left London and England behind her; and stepping once more onto French soil, felt for the first time for months a faint reviving of spirit.

She broke the journey for two days in Paris, took the night express South and arrived at Monte Carlo the next morning, to see that perfect jewel of beauty in a blaze of unclouded sunshine with the



deep blue of the Mediterranean rivalling the blue of the sky itself.

She had taken a little villa in the direction of the upper end of the Boulevard du Nord, a tiny white-walled gem of a house half hidden in orange and lemon trees, with a shady lawn and a riot of heliotrope and climbing geranium falling in long cascades of scent and loveliness over the walls, and a wide marble balcony and two flights of curving marble steps leading from the salon to the lawn and a little fern-edged mossy grotto where a tiny spring sparkled and danced.

And there, a fortnight after her arrival Eve joined her and the two spent long quiet days together, save when Pauline insisted on Eve's accepting some invitation or taking a more active part in the gaiety that was unendingly without the walls.

The heat came quickly, a joy to Pauline whose debilitated state of health made her feel the slightest chill, and one morning she announced that she would walk down to the Casino terrace.

"My dear, how splendid!" Eve exclaimed. "But are you sure you're fit enough? You won't mind if you meet people you know?"

"No," Pauline said, "I will not mind. At least Eve, if I do, they won't know. And that's the only thing that matters. I've been selfish long enough and I'm ashamed. We'll read our letters and then we'll start."

The post was just in and there were home letters

for each. Eve took hers out onto the balcony and read them through—and amongst them found the blue envelope of a telegram which she tore open in anxiety. The message was from her father, long, bewildering, and as the sense of it gradually penetrated her brain, she uttered a stifled cry and put out her hand to steady herself by the balustrade

She read it twice, three times, then suddenly her mouth quivered, and stumbling down the steps she fled into the shadowy depths of the garden, to drop down on the grass sobbing and laughing at once.

When at last she returned it was at least fifteen minutes after the hour when she had arranged with Pauline to start for their walk, and Pauline looked a little surprised, but she was too deeply interested by a letter she had received to take further notice and as they walked slowly down the steep curve of the road to the steps of the Casino terrace, she spoke of it.

"I've had a letter from Raven," she said. "He is staying on at St. Peter's. It seems the Bishop had convinced him of his mistake in thinking of leaving. It's a great relief, I could not bear to think of him as failing in his work."

"That is very good news," Eve said warmly, "Raven is a fine man and will be a great one some day. I've news too, Pauline. Madge is married."

They were seated on one of the seats by the great hedge of orange-blossom that scents the whole



terrace on summer nights, and at her words Pauline first grew very white, then as the full meaning of the news came to her, turned to Eve with a faint lovely colour creeping into her cheeks, a soft-dazed radiance in her eyes.

"Then he is mine," she said very low. "Mine for always now . . . oh, Eve . . . thank God!"

They sat awhile on the wide terrace watching the few people saunter by for it was still early and the fashionable world was not yet astir, then by mutual consent they went slowly on the Casino garden, surely one of the loveliest spots on earth despite the tragedies that have been associated with its name, and there sat while gazing over the sweep of velvet turf and lovely flowers, to where, beneath the branches of ilex and myrtle, the turquoise sea glittered far below.

Then at last Pauline spoke.

"One of the worst things to me has been just that," she said slowly as if carefully choosing her words. "The thought that Madge's claim came first, that had he lived to come back it would have been to become Madge's husband. I'm ashamed of it . . . bitterly ashamed . . . love is a very exacting and rebellious thing, Eve . . . but now it is over. Desmond"—her voice thrilled a little at the mere mention of his name—"Desmond is mine now—for always."

Eve put her hand to her throat; she was angry with herself that tears were swelling there, and,

seeing her emotion, Pauline made a quick movement as if to comfort her, not realising its true cause was joy.

"Dear—forgive me! Once again I am absorbed in myself and my own feelings. Eve, what an unsatisfactory friend I must be to you and what a darling you have been to me. By the way"—she was smiling now—"you're going to the Capels' luncheon. I accepted by telephone while you were reading your letters. If you don't go out you'll become a veritable curiosity to your friends."

Eve knew protest was useless and submitted, but presently spoke impulsively.

"Pauline! Come too! They would be overjoyed and you should begin to go out. It would be good for you, dear—do!"

But Pauline shook her head and to all Eve's pleadings turned a deaf ear, so after a while Eve said no more but sat watching the blue bay with the white sails of a tiny racing boat crossing it and the lovely hillside of olive groves and woods and villas running down to that sea's edge.

Well as she knew Pauline, deep as Pauline's love for Desmond had been, she had never realised till lately the full depth and strength of that passion; Pauline's heart was buried in that far-off grave, and Eve knew as surely as though the future lay unveiled before her, that never again would a man stir love or passion within her. Yet how attractive she was despite the shadows beneath her eyes, and



the fine lines grief had traced about the mouth; Eve's own fair English prettiness was blotted out by Pauline's ivory pallor with the black of her hair and eyes. There was tragedy, passion, experience, unfathomable tenderness in the face of her friend, and as she looked she wondered that Pauline should be so indifferent to the effect of her beauty upon others.

They walked slowly up the short hill as the morning advanced, and presently Eve drove away to her luncheon party and Pauline to her very great content was left alone. Not that she did not treasure Eve's tender care and company but it was in loneliness of the body that she found least loneliness of soul and now in her chaise-longue with books and papers untouched beside her she lay back among her cushions to dream.

Her chair was placed close by the little grotto that arched a foot back under the balcony and on either side at the foot of the curving marble stairway a thick stemmed palm grew in a big green tub, casting its heavy shadow on steps, delicate marble tracery of the balustrade and velvet turf alike.

The garden was very still, drowned in sunshine or steeped in shadow. Butterflies danced over the English flowers in the border-stocks, wall-flowers, pink and white bachelor's buttons, purple and yellow iris—that bounded the grass; and the grass in its turn sloped gently downwards, a vista of cool

deep shade between thick growing myrtle, ilex and cork trees. Heliotrope hung in lovely masses over the balustrade, a scarlet geranium climbed up the rough trunk of a palm and boldy flaunted its wonderful colour against the hot azure of the sky, and only the hum of bees and the distant voluptuous cooing of a dove broke the dreaming silence. Pauline closed her eyes after a while; it seemed to her that all this beauty of sky and earth but intensified at times her own pain, and she knew such thoughts were morbid and ungrateful.

A step came onto the balcony above and though she heard she did not lift her lids; she knew well enough that it was Estelle come to see if she had all she needed and she did not want Estelle just then. So she pretended to sleep when the footsteps came down the steps, slowly as if uncertain whether to advance or retreat—and then suddenly she realised that it was not Estelle, that some one else stood only a yard or two away, watching her, and with a start she opened her eyes.

A little more gaunt than before, worn by the fires through which he had passed, wearing the light grey he affected so much, bareheaded in the sunshine he came to her as he had come in life, and very slowly she sat upright, clutching the arms of her chair, with dilating eyes and lips from which all the colour had drained.

“Desmond!”

She did not know she spoke but he heard it and



over the drawn lines of his face and into his eyes blazed a light that was surely vitally human—and like a blinding flash the truth burst upon her. It was he—Desmond—no visitor from the life beyond, but alive, in the flesh—and with a cry that was almost a shriek she flung out her arms and felt his own crush her before she slid into the darkness.

She struggled back, hearing his anguished voice muttering her name, and as memory returned, joy so long a stranger poured into her soul like wine; and opening her eyes she found him kneeling beside her holding her and calling her name.

“Pauline—Pauline—Pauline!”

Just for a second she lay, gathering her strength, content to lie in his arms and gaze into his face, then seeing his distress full consciousness came to her and with a quick exclamation she put her hands over his.

“Desmond! My darling—don’t look like that. I’m all right—there’s nothing wrong but I couldn’t believe it. I thought it was your spirit—Desmond, Desmond, oh, my dear, my love—”

Eve returning from her luncheon found them together and cried in his arms till laughter and sheer joy mingled with her fears and when at last she was coherent and enough composed to listen heard his story.

He had been picked up for dead by a scouting party of nomad Arabs, had been nursed back to

life in their tents, held to ransom and exchanged for one of their chiefs; from Baghdad he had travelled to Basra, from Basra a gunboat had taken him to Alexandria and there, afraid to cable, still weak from all he had been through he collapsed with fever. When he was well enough he was put aboard a P. & O. steamer and sent home, and on arriving in London the first thing he learned was the fact of Madge's marriage, his own freedom, and Pauline's sojourn in the South. His father had come with him to Paris—Lord Clere could not bear to part with him till he must—and was there now, and he had come on as fast as steam could bring him to Monte Carlo.

It was not till sundown was near and the shadows were falling that he told them of Easton, and when at last he was alone with Pauline he spoke from the depths of his heart.

"He suffered agony for an idea," he said, looking out into the violet dusk. "He believed that nothing mattered but the Christ life and that suffering is expiation—sometimes even for the sins of another. And I wonder sometimes if it was for my sake he bore that suffering . . . for my sin . . . I may be all wrong . . . so may he . . . but he believed in it enough to die for it . . . bearing one another's burdens . . . I'm not fit, Pauline . . . but I will be—I will be, oh, my dear, how I love you!"

The stars were coming out, the treacherous



aftermath of the sunset hour had gone by; and hand in hand they went down to the foot of the steps in the sweet-scented shadowy dusk, and as if those last words, that solemn vow had lifted an unconscionable burden from his soul, Desmond felt a great joy rush through him.

They talked together, pacing up and down, dined with Eve, and enjoyed a laughter long since strange to them both, and Desmond announced that he intended to buy the villa and give it to Pauline on their wedding day. And because weddings in any country but one's own take a tiresome time to arrange, it was decided that they should all three pick up Lord Clere in Paris, rush through to London, be married by special license and return to the South.

"You needn't fear I shall faint any more!" Pauline assured Eve as the latter appeared anxious when they were saying good night in her room several hours later. "I'm done with being ill—Desmond has cured me—oh, Eve, Eve,—I shall not sleep and I don't want to! And yet I want the morning and Desmond . . . kiss me good-night, it's after one . . ."

They clung together in tender embrace, then Eve departed, and left alone Pauline opened her windows, stepped on the balcony, and looked out into the dusk where the lilies glimmered faintly and the fragrance of orange-blossom and night-stock made of the garden scents an incense of joy,

and as she looked one sentence written by unknown
fingers long, long ago came into her mind so that
she said it aloud:

“ ‘And the Lord God walked in the garden in the
cool of the day.’ ”

THE END

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